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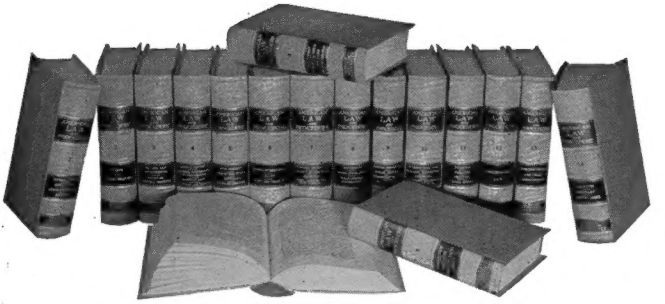

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Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

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ALL YOU DO IS FIGHT!

BARNEY WALSH had reached the rue de Clichy and was standing close to the curb, waiting for a break in the traffic so that he might cross the street, when two men, who had been staring at a display of canned goods in a grocery window, turned and closed in upon him.

Their movements were so deliberate, they looked so commonplace in their baggy, ready-made clothes and derby hats that no one on that crowded thoroughfare gave them a second glance. Barney did not become aware of their presence until they stood close beside him, one at each elbow.

It was his first contact with French detectives, but he knew them at once for what they were. Their calling was stamped on their morose, heavily jowled faces as clearly as though the words "Sureté Générale" had been embossed in letters of gold on their sweat-streaked hat ribbons.

Walsh's lean countenance turned to flint. He stood stock still until the detective on his right said through his bushy black mustache:

"Bernard Walsh, we have orders to place you under arrest."

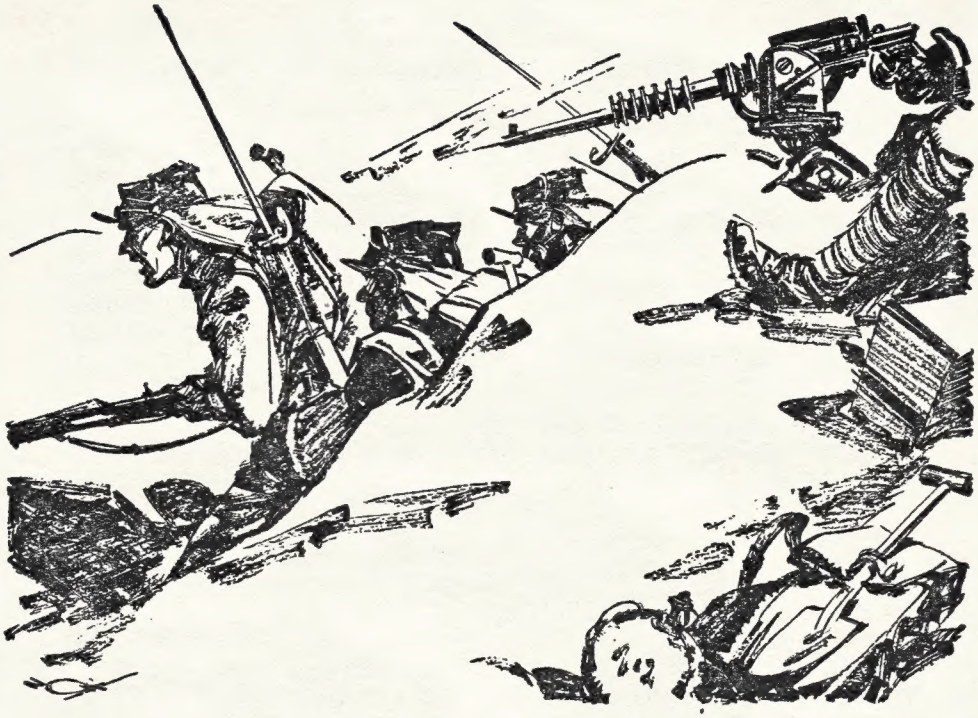
He spoke in an off-hand manner as though he were discussing some trivial matter, the weather for instance. His English was very bad, but Barney understood every word of it.

His eyebrows went up and a faint smile twisted the corners of his mouth.

"Place me under arrest!" he stalled. "What's the big idea?"

The plain-clothes man did not attempt to conceal his satisfaction.

"We do not waste much time, eh? *Ah, làlà!* You foreigners. You think you are so smart! You think here in Paris



A novelette by J. D. NEWSOM

nobody can find you. But it is easy. Yesterday, the inspector said to us, 'Find this Walsh. He entered the country with a forged passport made out to the name of Fenwick. The American government wants us to hold him until he can be extradited. He is a most dangerous criminal.' And you see, in less than twenty-four hours, we have you, Mr. Walsh-Fenwick, the notorious public enemy. It was not very difficult to pick up your trail."

Barney's smile became more pronounced.

"Well," he admitted. "I guess you win."

"Always," nodded the detective, laying a heavy hand on his prisoner's shoulder. "You come quietly, yes?"

"Might as well," nodded Barney, sliding a sidelong glance at the heavy traffic rolling down the street.

The detective gave a chuckle which seemed to come from the pit of his stomach.

"You are sensible. That is wise because the inspector said, 'Watch him. Run no risks. The Americans warn us he is a killer. We do not want such vermin loose over here. Shoot him if he makes a single move to resist, and make sure you shoot first'."

"I'll take your word for it," agreed Walsh. "What happens now? Do we stand here and watch the cars go by or what have you?"

The plain-clothes man tightened his grip on Barney's shoulder, shaking him playfully till his teeth almost rattled.

"They are not so terrible, these famous American gangsters! I have had more trouble arresting many a pickpocket. We shall make the trip to headquarters in a taxi, yes? Armand, my good one," he spoke over Barney's head to his team-mate, "stop the first *voiture*

that comes this way. We did not have one in readiness," he told the prisoner with jovial brutality, "because we did not know whether to call a taxi or a hearse."

"You got a one-track mind," Walsh declared. "I wouldn't know what to do with a gun if you gave me one."

As he spoke, however, his right hand traveled slowly upward toward the holster strapped beneath his armpit. But the detectives were too observant and too quick for him. Before his fingers touched the butt end of the automatic, his captors grabbed his wrists and twisted his arms up behind his back with so much vigor that he was thrown forward and fell to his knees.

The plain-clothes men did not loosen their grip. They were taking no chances with this desperado for whose arrest the Federal authorities had offered a fat reward. They held on like grim death, almost wrenching his arms out of their sockets, holding him so close to the curb that the mudguard of a passing truck nearly scalped him.

And to their determination to run no risks Barney owed his life.

As they laid hands on him a closed car swerved in toward the sidewalk. A man sitting in the back seat thrust the muzzle of a sawed-off shot-gun through the open window. He let drive just as Barney stumbled and went down on his knees.

The sound of the shot was covered by the noise of hundreds of diminutive French automobiles grinding up the rue de Clichy in second gear. But the next instant all hell broke loose in that busy, over-crowded thoroughfare.

One of the detectives, drilled through the heart, fell forward, striking his head against the fender of a taxicab. The other one, clapped both hands to his eyes, and yelled:

"I can not see! *Mon Dieu,* I am blind!

Women screamed, and a plate glass window rained jagged fragments upon the sidewalk. A portly gentleman clutched frantically at the seat of his pants as he ran around in circles, shouting:

"Assassins! Help! Police!"

A great mob, torn between fear and morbid curiosity, milled around the victims. More people leaned out of apartment and office windows, gesticulating frantically, pointing in the general direction of a dark blue sedan, which had raced away before the traffic tied itself up in hysterical knots. Infuriated bystanders, who had come up too late to witness the actual shooting, were trying to drag the taxicab driver, who had struck the detective, off his seat.

So great was the excitement that no one paid the slightest attention to Barney Walsh. He picked up his hat, crossed the street without undue haste, paused to light a cigarette, and walked away without once glancing over his shoulder.

MARIE-LOUISE threw the door wide open, rushed out onto the landing and clasped Barney's hands in both of her own.

"Barnee!" she cooed. "My darrr-ling! I am so 'appy to see you. I listen—I 'ear the footstep on the stairs—and my 'eart palpitates so fast, yes, when I say to myself, 'That is 'im!' You are just in time for lunch. It is *midi*—what you call midday."

She held him at arm's length, gazing into his steady, unsmiling gray eyes, then, unable to resist the impulse, she kissed him chastely on both cheeks.

She was taking no chances with Barney Walsh. No tenth rate musical-hall *artiste* of her acquaintance had ever hooked and gaffed a more promising sucker. She had met him one evening while she was having a bite to eat at a night club with Gaston Michaud, who had spent several years in America and had come home without a sou. Michaud

was not a good prospect for Marie-Louise. His methods of acquiring wealth were too dubious and much too uncertain to make him at all desirable, but he knew lots of people in the theatrical underworld, and as such he had his uses.

But as soon as she met Barney Marie-Louise had decided to let her career flop for a while. Barney spent money like water. According to Michaud he was worth a great wad of dough, and Marie-Louise, who did not let the grass grow beneath her feet, had sworn a great oath that she would marry this young American businessman, and devote the rest of her days to promoting her own shows with her alimony.

Having embraced him, she gave him a playful shake.

"But you are so cold, my darrr-ling, so distant! *Le vilain!* My beeg American iceberg. Come in quickly. We must have a little aperitif before we eat."

She hurried him across a small vestibule into a bright, cheerful dining room with a table set for two, standing by the open window giving on a very narrow balcony where begonias grew in red pots. From the kitchen came a pleasant smell of cooking and the muttered imprecations of an elderly female dressed for the occasion in a black dress and a skimpy white apron.

It was only when they stood by the window, with the clear May sunlight streaming into the room, that it dawned upon Marie-Louise that there was something strangely wrong with this clam-like Yankee. He seemed tense and preoccupied and—dangerous. Never before had she seen that lean, hard look on his face. He reminded her of a bird of prey. For no good reason she liked him better that way, even though a chill of fear rippled down her back as she exclaimed:

"Barnee! Is something wrong? You 'ave been in an accident perhaps?"

Without a change of expression he held out his gray felt hat.

"Notice anything peculiar about that lid?" he inquired, speaking in a slow drawl out of the corner of his mouth.

For one brief moment she thought he was about to show her some imbecile conjuring trick (Americans were such overgrown children!), but her relief was short-lived. In the crown of the hat there were two round holes, and one side of the brim looked as though it had been gnawed by mice.

"Bullet holes," he explained in the same slow drawl. "Couple of inches lower and I was all washed up."

Marie-Louise gave a horrified gasp which, for once, was quite genuine.

"You 'ave been shot at! But it is monstrous, my Barnee! It was an accident, surely. You must tell me."

"Yeah," nodded Barney. "It was no accident, sister. They were out gunning for me."

It occurred to Marie-Louise that she knew next door to nothing about this thin-lipped, hard-eyed young man. Any one more unlike the proverbial sucker would have been hard to find. She had classed him as a typical American, and Americans, she had been led to believe, were as soft as mush, although they pretended to be very stiff and unsentimental. But there was nothing superficial about Barney's toughness, and she wondered how she had been stupid enough to make such a mistake and waste her talents on such a cold-blooded devil.

"But why? But how?" she stammered.

"I'm coming to that," said Barney. "I got a hunch you're on the level. You better had be, sister. I'm telling you. Now listen: how well do you know this bird Michaud? Don't make a speech. This is business. I got to work fast."

"Michaud," she repeated. "We 'ave been friends a long time. But I do not know 'im so veree well," she added hastily. "It is not 'im tried to kill you, surely?"

"That can wait. What did he tell you about me?"

She shrugged her shoulders. Michaud had assured her that Barney was a sap. No brains, lots of money. An easy mark for a clever girl like her. But she could not afford to repeat that conversation.

"I do not remember," she said lamely. "Not very well. I t'ink he told me you 'ad a beeg business in Detroit where 'e met you, is it not?"

"Is that all? Did he mention my line of business? Come on, snap out of it!"

"That is of no interest to me," she declared, trying to steer him toward pleasanter channels. "What is monee to me?"

"Cut out the baloney," Barney retorted. "I'm going to give you the straight dope. I'm no businessman, sister. I'm what they call a public enemy. Gangster to you. D'you know what that means?"

Marie-Louise tittered nervously. She did not have to be told the meaning of that word. The Paris papers, which dearly love to explain America's defects to their readers, have been full of sensational gangster stories for many years.

"It is a joke you make wiz me," she protested.

"Don't kid yourself. Ever heard of Nick Tulesco's mob in Detroit? I guess not. I played ball with him because I was after easy money. I wanted a couple of hundred thousand just to be on the safe side, then I said I'd quit."

He lit a cigarette and pitched it away after a couple of puffs. The squawk of motor horns drifted into the room. Pans rattled in the kitchen. Marie-Louise said nothing. She was less interested in Barney's past career than she was in her own plight. She had been sold a pup. She had wasted over three months trying to entice this American to the altar—and he turned out to be a gangster! It was a nasty situation which might have disastrous consequences for a conscientious gold-digger striving after respectability and an assured income.

"I quit all right," Barney went on jerkily. "I wanted to buy a farm and breed cattle. Can you tie that? Nick swore I'd double-crossed him. The crazy mutt thought I'd salted away a couple of million. That started it. I been on the run ever since, and it's cost me plenty. You can't hold on to that kind of dough. It slips through your fingers. Nothing's safe. Hell, I was better off when I was driving a truck! When Nick found I'd hopped to this side of the water he got busy with some of his crooked politicians. They smeared me all over the front page of every newspaper in town. Income tax evasion, murder, extortion, kidnaping. I'm no angel, but I ain't that bad. There's a warrant out for my arrest. Federal warrant. If they land me it'll be just too bad."

"The soup's ready," announced the maid of all work, favoring the turtledoves with a toothless leer. "Does *madame* want me to serve—"

Marie-Louise cut her short.

"No—yes—no! Get out, I am not hungry." As an afterthought she turned to Barney. "Lunch?" she inquired. "You want something to eat?"

"Not today. Got to be moving."

"But you must eat," she decided illogically, keeping up the pretence of intense devotion although all need for it had gone. "All right, Albertine, bring the soup."

It was a peculiar meal. Walsh ate standing up, a cigarette in one hand, a spoon in the other. Between mouthfuls he talked.

"This morning they tried to arrest me. French cops. They had me cold. I got away because of your friend Michaud."

"Ah!" breathed Marie-Louise, hoping for the best. "'E is a true friend."

"Like hell he is. He's a rat. He told you to make a play for me, didn't he? Sure he did. I was wise to you, sister,

right from the start, but it was sort of fun. I thought I was sitting pretty here in Paris, and that gave Michaud plenty of time to get in touch with Nick Tulesco."

"No!"

"What do you mean—no? I'm telling you. A car breezed up just as the cops jumped me. Michaud was at the wheel. I saw him as I see you now. Not three feet away. Tony Varella was in the back seat with a shot gun. He blew the heads off the two cops, and wounded God knows how many. I beat it before the smoke cleared."

MARIE-LOUISE choked over a mouthful of *potage vermicelle*. She could not quite follow Walsh's account of the affair, but she understood enough to realize that detectives had been killed, and that she was harboring a dangerous criminal. Self-pity swept over her in waves. She might be implicated, sent to prison, her reputation torn to tatters for the French people, though they like to read about foreign gangsters, are filled with righteous wrath at the mere thought that such creatures may seek shelter in their midst.

"*Mon Dieu,*" wailed Marie-Louise, "it is dreadful what you tell me. Michaud would not do such a thing!"

"For five thousand bucks he'd sell his own mother," retorted Barney. "That's what Nick offered for my hide. There ain't another man in Paris who could have spotted me. Not one."

Marie-Louise was compelled to admit that the case against Michaud was conclusive.

"But you must do something," she protested, eager to be rid of her guest. "You must go away. You must 'ide!"

"Go where? I'm ditched. I don't know the ropes over here, and anyway you can't move without a whole bunch of identity papers and passports and God knows what. If the cops don't get me Michaud will. It's a fifty-fifty proposition."

"There's breaded veal cutlets and new potatoes, if you want any," said Marie-Louise biting a bright red thumb nail. "Have you no idea what you will do?"

"Sure I have. Michaud ought to be along any time now and—"

"No, no, no!" she cried, wringing her hands. "That is horrible. You must t'ink of me. They will put you in prison—'

"Not a chance. I've had a skinful of being hunted and double-crossed, and wondering what's going to happen when I reach the next corner. It ain't no way to live. I'm getting the jitters. And what am I going to eat when my money's gone? I'm through, but I'm going to fix Michaud's feet if it's the last thing I do."

Marie-Louise suddenly felt very sorry for him, but her sorrow was mitigated by her anxiety to get him out of the apartment, as far from her as possible.

"There is a way out," she assured him. "One way—if it is not too late. 'Ave you 'eard of the Foreign Legion?"

"That outfit in Africa? Is that what you mean? I read about it somewheres. Nothing doing, sister."

She was on her feet, facing him, pleading with him passionately.

"You must. There was an Austrian I met. He served in the Legion. It is only for five years. All you do is fight. They ask no questions of you. Nothing. And then you are safe. No more running away, Barnee. Safe! The police can not arrest you. Your Nick Tulesco can not follow you. You give whatever name you wish, and when you leave they give you papers with that name on them, and you make a new start."

"Says you! But all that cockeyed stuff about discipline and hard-boiled top-sergeants gives me a pain."

"You will have a worser pain, Barnee, if they send you to prison. It is better than a bullet in the back, better than

your electric chair. And if you are killed you die as a soldier, not as a criminal."

"That sure helps a lot," Barney said sourly.

"What else is there?" she insisted.

He went to the balcony and looked down at the busy street. Everything seemed normal. No one loitered on the sidewalk outside the building. He turned back toward Marie-Louise and picked up his battered hat.

"There ain't another doggone thing, sister," he admitted. "Where's the recruiting office? Write it on a piece of paper so I can show it to the cab driver. My French ain't so hot."

She scribbled the words, "Bureau Militaire, rue des Dominicains," on the back of a butcher's bill and thrust it into his hand.

"I am very glad, Barnee," she said with a catch in her voice. "What you 'ave done you can not change. So you must begin a new life and the old one will be forgotten. If they ask me about you I shall say you 'ave gone to Belgium."

She did not attempt to kiss him. They shook hands, and she stood on the threshold, listening to the sound of his quick footsteps until he reached the ground floor. Then she slammed the door, went back to the dining-room and burst into tears.

"*Comment!*" exclaimed the maid, lumbering in after her. "He is gone, and the breaded veal cutlets not even touched! After all the work I've done! Isn't he coming back?"

"Never," sobbed Marie-Louise. "He had to leave on a business-trip. He won't be back—today."

"Such an agreeable *monsieur*," sighed the maid. "Always so quiet and so—"

"Imbecile!" screamed Marie-Louise. "I am glad he is gone. I am overjoyed. I hated him. Get out of here and leave me alone."

But whether her tears were due to relief, or regret, or disappointment she herself did not begin to know.

The maid shuffled back to her kitchen and started scraping the veal cutlets into the garbage pail.

AT ELEVEN o'clock that morning Walsh knew little and cared less about the French Foreign Legion. Soldiers filled him with derision. He had nothing but contempt for poor boobs who had themselves shot down to make dividends safe for armament manufacturers.

By one o'clock, however, he was so anxious to get into the Legion that he almost had heart failure when a bored and disgruntled sergeant, seated behind a rickety desk in a dingy office, informed him that, effectively, the Foreign Legion was open to all comers.

"*Alors,*" said Barney in his abominable French. "I desire to engage myself."

The sergeant looked him over without enthusiasm. Most would-be recruits belonged to a definite social group. Poverty was their outstanding characteristic. Hungry men, misfits, petty crooks, booze hounds, crack-brained adventurers weary of family ties and many mouths to feed, these were the stuff the Legion was made of. Later on they might turn into dependable soldiers, but when they appeared before the recruiting sergeant they were full of deference and submission.

Barney was not so easy to classify. His double-breasted blue serge suit had evidently been made to order by a high-priced tailor. His collar was spotless, his necktie was new, the heels of his well polished shoes were not run down. Nor did he show any signs of cringing in the presence of authority. His hard, sharp-featured countenance was closed and expressionless, although the sergeant thought he detected a faint glint of mockery in Barney's coldly appraising gray eyes.

"You are sure you want to enlist?" he inquired. "If I were you I would think it over. You can't change your mind after you have signed your papers."

"I am here," Walsh labored to explain, "because I desire to join the Foreign Legion. *Voilà!*"

"Ah!" remarked the sergeant, annoyed by that meaningless *"voilà!"* You seem to know what you want, but I think you had better consult the captain. He speaks English and can understand what you say, which is more than *I* can do."

So Barney, whose knees displayed a remarkable tendency to knock together, was escorted into an even smaller, dingier room, smelling of stale tobacco smoke, old papers and ink, where he was interviewed by a middle-aged officer with a capacious stomach and an exasperating habit of leaving most of his sentences unfinished while he stared at the fly specks on the shade of his desk lamp.

"You see," he told Barney, "the Legion is—"

"You bet," Barney agreed after an interminable pause. "Me—join—Legion. Yes."

The strain became so great that he found himself talking pidgen English but even that didn't arouse the captain, who went on dreamily:

"You must not make a mistake. The Legion needs—requires—demands the utmost of those who serve. They must be prepared to endure—"

"That's swell," declared Barney, watching the door, wondering whether he was being detained while the sergeant called the cops. But at last the captain spoke again to say that Barney looked like a *monsieur* of refinement and culture, accustomed to life's amenities, and as such he might not be able to endure the Spartan simplicity of the Legion.

Barney was not able to repress a lopsided grin at the idea that he was a gentleman of refinement and culture, but he let that pass.

"I'll risk it," he assured the officer. "I can get used to most anything, I guess."

The captain stood up and escorted him to the sergeant's office.

"There is room in the Legion for men of your type," he declared, shaking Walsh's hand. "Men with high ideals. Men who will—"

He nodded sagely and departed, closing the door in Barney's face.

But Barney was not yet in the Legion. There were papers to be made out, and another five minutes, that seemed like five centuries, elapsed while the sergeant noted down the fact that the recruit's name was William Barney, twenty-five years of age, and an American.

"The doctor will examine you," said the non-com, pushing open another door. "Undress in here and sit on the bench until he arrives."

Walsh found himself in a bare, low-ceiled room, damp as a tomb, with a red-tiled floor and a strong aroma of creosote. Beneath the heavily barred window stood a sink with a brass tap, beside the sink there was a table and a chair. Against the opposite wall stood a wooden bench, dark and polished by generations of potential Legionnaires. And on this museum piece a large, muscular man, very pink and naked, sat with his arms tightly wrapped across his hairy, barrel-like chest. Bull-necked, heavy-jawed, with bulging eyes set flush with his broad cheek-bones, the best thing that can be said about him is that he looked rugged and virile. A three-day growth of brick-colored whiskers did not improve his appearance.

He sat bolt upright when Barney entered the room, examining him carefully from head to foot. And all at once he clapped a huge paw over his mouth and roared with laughter. Fresh spasms shook him when Barney loosened his tie. He smacked his thighs, clutched

his aching sides, and gurgled mightily as though he were about to die for want of breath.

"You're having a good time," nodded Walsh, who was endeavoring to take off his coat and hang it up without disclosing the presence of the holster sewed into the lining.

The man went off into renewed convulsions.

"An Englishman, *Gottverdom!*" he wheezed painfully. "What are you doing here?"

"You're all wet," Walsh retorted. "I'm American, and it's none of your damn business what I'm doing here."

His neighbor, apparently, thought Americans were even funnier than the English.

"And you are enlisting!" he exclaimed. "Such a nice young chap. Does mama know you are out?"

Even then Barney did not lose his temper. Now that he was almost in the Legion, almost free from the nightmare existence he had led for so many months, he did not give a curse what this hairy ape thought of him.

"I'll write and tell her all about it," he declared, pulling a long, sober face. "She'll be surprised."

But the joke fell flat. The man spat contemptuously within an inch of Barney's feet.

"That's right," he observed, laying on the sarcasm with a trowel. "You must not forget the old mama. You must be a good boy and write once a week."

HE LEANED forward while Walsh was stooping to unlace his shoes, and dealt him a tremendous smack between the shoulder blades.

"What's that?" he demanded, running his fingers over the bulky wallet in Walsh's hip pocket.

There was plenty of weight behind that smack, but Walsh made no complaint.

"That's a wallet," he explained placidly.

"Money?" the man edged over closer, his broad nostrils quivering.

"A little."

His neighbor caught him by the elbow and dragged him down onto the bench.

"How much?" he demanded sharply.

"A couple of hundred or so. Nothing much."

The man threw a heavy arm across Barney's shoulders and breathed stale beer fumes in his face. He had, he declared, taken a great liking to Barney. Yes, sir, he had! He had been to New York once and was a great admirer of America. His name was Groote, Otto Groote. His home town was Antwerp, but he was one of nature's rolling stones and had worked at many strange jobs in far away places—foreman of a sheep ranch in Patagonia, deck-hand on a schooner in the New Hebrides, owner of a gambling joint on the island of Macao.

Of late he had been resting in Paris (he smacked his lips and winked to show Barney what he meant by a "rest"), but he could not stand life in a big city and was joining the Legion because, he said, it was a good way of seeing Africa. The Legion was an open book to him. He talked about it as though he had spent a life-time in its ranks.

"But you," he said earnestly, "you have no experience of such things. It is all new to you. Some Legionnaires are rough customers. You must be careful. If they find you with two hundred or three hundred francs—or more perhaps, eh?—they would stick a knife into you."

"Boy howdy!" commented Walsh. "Is it that bad?"

"*Gottverdom!* It is always bad for men like you. But you can trust me. I take good care of you. Nobody can fool Groote. You give me the money and I keep it for you. Then if some *cochon* comes to you and asks for

money you send him to me, haha! I show him something. I show him this!"

"This" was an outsize in fists which he held so close to Barney's nose that the latter had to squint to examine it.

"I'll think it over," Barney promised.

Groote, however, was a fast worker. His hand slid off Barney's shoulder and his thick fingers groped clumsily for the button closing the hip pocket.

"You trust me," he advised, grinning as he flourished his fist close to Barney's face. "I have knocked about the world. We are comrades now, in the Legion, and—"

There were limits to Barney's patience. Those limits had been reached. He did not mind being laughed at, he rather enjoyed Groote's reckless lying, but he drew the line at being held up and robbed. His wallet held not a few hundred but several thousand francs, all that remained of his original stake, and he had every intention of hanging onto those notes, if possible, in case of future emergency.

Groote wasn't an emergency. He was merely a nuisance.

"Listen, mug," Barney warned him, "and get this straight. I'll take care of my own dough and I don't need help. Why, you poor mutt, you're too dumb to hold up a ten-year-old kid and get away with it!"

But Groote was much too sure of his strength, and too greedy, to attach the slightest importance to anything Barney might have to say.

He stood up too, squaring his great shoulders, swelling his chest to its full extent.

"That is no way to talk when I try to help you," he growled, scowling ominously. "You give me that money to keep or else—"

As he spoke he reached toward Walsh, but before his fingers could find a purchase on his victim's neck, something happened, something incredible. Walsh's fist shot out and crashed against the side of his jaw. The blow had not traveled two feet, but it landed on Groote's chin with sledge-hammer force.

His legs went out from under him. He skidded across the floor and came to rest against the bench. Two threads of blood trickled out of his nostrils into his open mouth.

Too stunned to heave himself to his feet, he clung to the edge of the bench, gaping at Walsh, who had turned away and was unbuttoning his shirt as calmly as though nothing extraordinary had taken place.

"*Gottverdeckt!*" muttered the astounded Fleming. "To me—you did such a thing!"

"You bet," assented Walsh. "And if that don't hold you I'll sock you again."

"I could break you in two," swore Groote. "I could tear off your damned head."

He got no farther just then, for the door opened and the medical officer bustled into the room. Bald and bearded, he was rather skinny and undersized, but his lack of inches was amply compensated by his truculent manner.

"Now then! Now then!" he exclaimed on catching sight of Groote's blood smeared head sticking above the end of the bench. "What's all this about? What are you doing on the floor?"

Groote struggled into an upright position. He stared hard at Walsh before he said:

"Begging your pardon, but I fell down and bumped myself. It is nothing."

The doctor took in the situation at the first sniff.

"You have been drinking. You are drunk. And that is spittle on the floor. I suppose you slipped on your own spittle. Serve you right. Filthy habit. You ought to be severely punished. Go get a mop and clean it up. No!" he cried as Groote fished a grimy handkerchief from his trousers pocket. "Not with that, cretin that you are. Get a floor cloth,

a mop, a bucket of disinfectant! And don't bleed all over the place."

He did not stop talking until Groote had put on his clothes and had been led away by the sergeant in search of cleaning materials.

"Now," added the doctor, pouncing upon Walsh. "You."

The examination was brief, perfunctory and explosive. Barney was in good shape, hard as nails, without an ounce of fat on his long, smooth muscles. He hopped, walked, bent over, and every time he misunderstood an order the doctor clutched at his beard and tried to tear it out by the roots. At last it was over.

"Not a thing wrong with you," the doctor summed up. "All right. Fit for active service. Dress and report to the sergeant."

Barney was wriggling into his coat when Groote reappeared armed with a bucket, a rag and a broom. When he beheld Barney a dark flush suffused his face and the veins stood out in knots on his temples.

"You'll pay for this," he promised in a throaty whisper. "I'll teach you a lesson, you treacherous swine."

"That'll be just fine," agreed Barney. "Just take your time and make a nice, clean job of that floor. I'll be seeing you."

"This way," barked the sergeant, hovering in the doorway. "What do you think this is—a debating society?"

In the outer office he thrust a pen in Barney's hand and jabbed a forefinger at a dotted line at the foot of a printed form.

"Sign here."

"Am I in?" inquired Walsh as he put down the pen.

"You are," the sergeant said heartily, "and let me warn you, my lad, from this moment onward you are subject to military law." His grumpy manner suddenly deserted him as he added with a subdued chuckle. "Next time you want to hit anybody pick on a fellow your own size, otherwise you'll get into plenty of trouble."

"How—"

"He told me. Wanted to have you arrested. Said you hit him while he had his back turned. But I asked him where he got that lump on his jaw and he shut up. Watch out for him. He's a bad actor."

He handed Barney five francs and a railroad warrant to Marseilles. "You are to take the eighteen minutes past twenty o'clock train at the P. L. M. station. If you miss it you'll be courtmartialed."

"What do I do in the meantime?" inquired Barney, confronted by the unpleasant prospect of having to hang around Paris for several hours.

"Do!" cried the sergeant. "It is nothing to me what you do. You have your marching orders. Clear out!"

"Don't I get an escort or something?" protested Barney.

"An escort, *mon Dieu!*" bellowed the sergeant. "These Americans. I suppose you want a couple of regiments and a brass band to parade with you to the station. But you can't deceive me, you scoundrel. You're hanging around, waiting for that fellow Groote to come out. If you want to fight, fight in the street. But I advise you to be careful. You knocked him down once. That is very good. Next time he may hit first and if he does there won't be much left of you. Now get out of here!"

WALSH thrust five hundred franc notes into the taxi driver's hand and hurried away. The amount of the fare was ninety odd francs.

"Hey!" cried the driver. "*Monsieur*—your change."

But Walsh was in no mood to worry about a few hundred francs more or less.

"Keep it," he called over his shoulder. The driver pocketed the money and

shrugged his shoulders up to his ears to express his disgust.

"These Americans," he said to a nearby porter. "*Quel peuple!* They throw their money away."

"Some do," admitted the porter, "and some don't. The more they have the less they give."

"Anyhow they're all crazy," said the driver. "Look at that one." He jerked his thumb at Walsh's receding figure. "He's been riding around in this cab of mine since a quarter past two. Out to Versailles, and Garches, and Asnières. Wouldn't stop for a bite to eat or a drink, and as soon as we get here, off he dashes as though the devil himself were on his trail."

Walsh, indeed, felt as though ten thousand devils were after him as he crossed the main hall and threaded his way through the scattered groups of travelers toward the platform gates. At any second he expected a gun muzzle to jolt against his ribs and to hear a voice say, "Stick 'em up!" But nothing happened. He reached the gates. The ticket inspector examined his warrant, raised one eyebrow, and said:

"Another Legionnaire, huh? You better hurry. Train leaves in one minute. There is a third-class compartment up ahead for you."

Sweat poured down Barney's cheeks as he went up the platform. It was as though every link blinding him to his past had snapped as he filed through the gate. And all at once he felt light headed and weak to the point of nausea.

Whistles were blowing and an employee equipped with a little flag cried "*En voiture!*" Passengers leaned out of the windows exchanging the customary platitudes with their friends on the quay. The engine hooted and the wheels began to turn.

Had Barney's life depended upon it he could not have reached the compartment to which he had been assigned. He grabbed the first hand-rail he saw and clambered up into a well lighted dining-car where the air was perfumed with the smell of roast lamb *printaniére*. He was very hungry.

The head-waiter spotted him instantly. In fluent English he informed Barney that the service had not yet started, but if he chose to sit down and "refresh himself" he was more than welcome. A moment later Barney reclined in a comfortable seat watching an attendant pour whisky into a glass not much larger than a good-sized thimble.

"Is that supposed to be a drink?" inquired Barney, who was beginning to revive. "It is? O. K. I'll buy the bottle."

Never before had a shot of whisky tasted so mellow, so warm and comforting. He glowed from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. First he drank to his dead past, then he toasted his escape from Nick Tulesco and the police, then he raised his glass in honor of Marie-Louise; and after that he settled down to do a little serious drinking because the nightmare was over and he could afford to relax without fear of being shot at, blackmailed or arrested.

When the first batch of diners lurched into the car he beamed upon them. They looked like law-abiding citizens, and so was he, by heck! No longer did he have to lie and hide and scheme to avoid the forces of law and order. Instead of carrying a gat under his armpit, hereafter he was going to carry a perfectly good rifle on his shoulder. If he shot any one he would be doing his duty instead of committing murder.

The thought delighted him so much that he poured himself another drink in his water tumbler, polished it off, and was still wreathed in smiles when three well-dressed, arrogant looking young men swayed up the aisle and stopped beside his table. There were no other vacant seats, but the three gentlemen, having stared down their noses at Barney and noted the half empty whisky

bottle, seemed disinclined to sit at his table.

One of them, a long, languid person with a toothbrush mustache and a thin, high-bridged nose, appealed in a loud aside to the head waiter.

"Is this—ah—passenger nearly finished? One finds the smell of whisky most objectionable."

The head-waiter's regret was profound. The American gentleman, he explained *sotto voce,* had not begun to eat. He was still refreshing himself.

"In that case," sighed the haughty gentleman, "I suppose we shall have to make the best of it."

"Howdy, gents," grinned Barney, who had reached the convivial stage. "Greetings to you, *mongsoors!* How about a small snifter just to break the ice?"

Perish the thought! They refused to admit that this garrulous individual could possibly be speaking to them. They ignored him. If they understood English they concealed the fact behind frigid masks, and when they happened to glance in Barney's direction they looked straight through him as though he were a figment of his own imagination.

As soon as they were seated they burst into animated conversation. Their voices were the voices of the ruling caste—loud, trenchant and unhurried. Their manners, too, were typical. Having made up their minds that Barney was an obnoxious alien they cold-shouldered him to a fare-you-well. He ceased to exist. Supremely indifferent and self-assured, they reached across and around him for such things as salt and pepper, water and mustard. To one another they were exquisitely polite, but they treated Barney as though he were a speck of dirt on the table cloth.

Barney, however, refused to be swept away.

"For May," he hazarded in his terrible French, "we are having the warm weather."

That didn't work, either. So he helped himself to another drink.

"Don't tell me I'm being high-hatted," he went on, addressing the languid gentleman with the toothbrush mustache who sat opposite him. "I couldn't stand it. No, sir, I could not. France is famous for her hospitabilitik! I mean hospi-hospitality. Let's have a bottle of champagne and see if that helps any."

The gentleman put down his knife and fork, and fixed Barney with a coldly impersonal stare.

"We do not," he said in very English English, "desire to make your acquaintance, sir. Be good enough to mind your business as we are minding ours, and I am sure we shall get along very well indeed. Thank you, sir."

"Is mah face red!" ejaculated Barney. "Socko! Right on the button. 'Be good enough to mind your business as we are minding ours!' Say, that's a swell line! That's great! I got to remember that."

HE DID not mind being insulted, he did not object very much when his neighbor's elbow joggled his arm as he carried food to his mouth, but he felt that the joke was being carried a little too far when his opposite number kicked him on the shin. It was not intentional. Of course not. Oh, no! The gentleman merely crossed his legs and the toe of his shoe had come in contact, inadvertently, with Barney's shin bone.

"Suffering pups!" he protested. "That ain't no way to act."

Once again the gentleman became aware of his existence.

"Your leg, sir? Kicked by me? An absurd idea, sir. Most certainly not."

He had dined very well; so had his companions. They exchanged glances charged with discreet amusement, but their amusement changed to consternation when Barney, with a nonchalance equal to their own, crossed his legs and

caught his fellow diner such a crack on the ankle that the latter emitted a yelp of pain.

"Imbecile!"

"Your leg, suh? Kicked by me?" drawled Barney, blowing cigarette smoke out of the corner of his mouth into the gentleman's face. "An absurd idea, suh! Most certainly not!"

A long moment dragged by while the three Frenchmen, overcome by unspeakable indignation, glowered at Barney. The gentleman he had maimed suddenly found his voice and cried:

"This is an infamy! Such creatures ought to be segregated. This drunken person," he informed the head-waiter who had dashed up the aisle, "now chooses to kick me beneath the table. It is a miracle my leg is not broken."

"It may have been an accident," soothed the head-waiter, thinking of the tip he would certainly lose if he had to take action against the American.

"Nothing of the sort," the gentleman replied with crushing scorn. "It was done deliberately. I demand the removal of this inebriate. At once! I warn you, my friend, I shall lodge a complaint against you with your company. Baron de Glatigny, chairman of the board of directors, is my intimate friend." He drew a card from his pocket and thrust it before the head-waiter's eyes. "Here is my name. I am Lieutenant Edouard d'Auclaire. I am not in the habit of submitting to the assaults of drunken foreigners. I insist upon his immediate departure!"

The head-waiter had never heard of the Baron de Glatigny, and although he was a member of the radical party and an ardent anti-militarist, like all good Frenchmen he had the greatest respect for his national army. Between a lieutenant and a semi-pickled American, he could not afford to hesitate. He knew which side his bread was buttered on, particularly since the lieutenant's loud protests had attracted the attention of every passenger in the dining-car.

He appealed to Barney. "I much regret, *monsieur*, but I shall have to ask you to move. Perhaps, you will take the little table by the service door. It is empty now. You will be more comfortable, yes?"

Barney ought to have accepted the compromise. Any man in his position with an atom of horse sense would have done so, but he was too full of food and booze to bother about consequences just then.

"No," he said amiably. "I'm fine and dandy right here, cap'n. These cooties have been asking for trouble ever since they breezed in. To hell with 'em! They don't own this joint. I'd throw 'em out if I was you, and if you need help, just say the word."

The head-waiter wiped the back of his hand across his damp forehead. The train was nearing Dijon station. Customers were clamoring for their checks. Waiters hovered uneasily in the background. Lieutenant d'Auclaire and his friends stood in the aisle, napkin in hand, waiting for him to do his duty.

He tried a different line of attack.

"A complaint has been lodged against you," he said sharply. "Either you pay your bill and vacate that seat or I shall summon the conductor."

"That'll be fine," agreed Barney, blowing cigarette smoke at the ceiling. "What a day! Gentlemen, this is the happiest day in my life. And now I am to meet a genuine French train conductor! O. K. Shoot the works. I'll tell him what I think of these lousy, cockeyed, he-chorus girls. Gertrude—" he waggled a reproachful forefinger at Lieutenant d'Auclaire—"you're the worst little spitfire I ever met."

Even then a major calamity might have been averted if Fate had not intervened at that moment in the guise of Legionnaire Groote, escorted by a dozen apoplectic, ungirt recruits. Boiled as

owls on the cheap red wine they had been guzzling ever since the train left Paris, they burst from their compartment the instant the train came to a standstill, and rolled down the platform to see what the white-collared passengers might be doing. The lights of the dining car attracted their attention. And Groote, as he lurched along, suddenly caught sight of Barney sitting there, smoking a cigarette as though he were a bourgeois capitalist instead of a recruit headed for Africa and the Legion.

Such snobbery was more than Groote could bear. He let out a yell which rang from one end of the platform to the other. Shaking his fist at Barney, he brayed:

"Look at him! Look at that little squirt. Too proud to travel with us. Too stuck up to associate with other Legionnaires. What's he doing in there? That's no place for a recruit."

Every word he said was clearly audible in the dining-car. Lieutenant d'Auclaire and his friends became very stern, very stiff. They were no longer young men about town, they were officers.

"Are you," d'Auclaire demanded, "a recruit of the Foreign Legion?"

"That's me," Barney admitted. "Long live the Legion!"

No one seemed to share his enthusiasm.

"Are you traveling on a government warrant?"

"What a mind!" cried Barney. "You ring the bell every time."

D'Auclaire spoke very slowly and distinctly to make himself heard above the clamor of the unwashed mob on the platform.

"I am an officer of the First Regiment of the Foreign Legion."

"Put it there!" exclaimed Barney, springing to his feet. "We'll let bygones be bygones. I'm glad to know you."

The lieutenant was not glad to know him. Far from it.

"Let me see your warrant," he ordered. "Quite so," he went on after Barney had produced the paper with a flourish. "Very well, Legionnaire Barney, you will hear about this later. You have no right to be in this dining car. Pay for your meal and leave instantly unless you want to be placed under arrest."

The word "arrest" had a sobering effect on Barney, but he objected to being ordered about by this superior young man.

"Say, wait a minute," he retorted. "How the heck do I know who you are? Let's have a look at *your* papers."

His request met with no response, for at that moment the head waiter, who had hurried away at the train stopped, reappeared followed by the conductor and two men in khaki uniforms, complete with leggings and belts of black leather. They were not policemen, they were *gendarmes*, members of a semi-military corps which performs many and varied duties. They patrol highways, enforce the law in villages, assist tax collectors, and last but not least they act as military policemen.

A staccato conversation ensued between d'Auclaire and the three newcomers. The *gendarmes* saluted, d'Auclaire stepped to one side, and the *gendarmes* confronted Barney. The leader, a brigadier, spoke briefly and to the point:

"Pay your bill and follow us."

Roars came from the recruits on the platform when Walsh drew a sheaf of notes from his pocket book; the *gendarmes* themselves blinked like owls. Barney paid and paid and paid—for his meal, for the whisky—for service, for the price of a first class ticket from Paris to Dijon, for having voyaged in a class superior to that indicated on his warrant.

"Anybody else want a handout?" he inquired, cocking a steely gray eye on d'Auclaire.

No one had ever addressed the lieu-

tenant in that insolent fashion. He turned a delicate shade of green.

"Take him away!" he told the *gendarmes.* "I'll see he is dealt with adequately at the depot. If he resists, arrest him."

"Coming?" demanded the brigadier, placing the palm of his hand on his revolver holster.

"Let's go," agreed Walsh, not knowing what lay in store for him. "This is a frame-up," he told d'Auclaire, "but maybe I'll be seeing you one of these days."

"You will," promised the lieutenant. "Get out!"

FLANKED by the two *gendarmes,* Barney marched away without protest. What happened during the next few minutes before the train pulled out is strictly off the record. There is no evidence that anything untoward occurred from the moment the *gendarmes* hustled their prisoner into the station lamp room until they hoisted him into the compartment reserved for Legionnaires.

Officially he was detained for his own good, to keep him away from the other recruits and to avoid a disturbance in a public place. Unofficially, the instant the door closed behind them the brigadier pinned Barney's arms behind his back while the other *gendarme* smacked his face.

"Manners," said the brigadier, digging one knee into Barney's spine. "That's what you need, you hyena—manners. Wait till you reach the depot. You won't insult any more officers!"

They worked with swiftness and dispatch. They did not injure Barney, they merely pulled his hair, trod on his toes, punched him in the stomach, and then, before he knew whether he was coming or going or merely standing on his head, they rushed him down the platform and booted him into a compartment, built to accomodate ten passengers, but actually holding fourteen raucous, perspiring recruits, who howled for joy when Barney fell in on top of them.

Barney was no longer mellow. He was not only sore, he was mad clean through. He grew much sorer and even madder, when his traveling companions, in a burst of high good humor, rolled him onto the floor covered with a thick layer of greasy papers, banana skins, sausage rinds and empty sardine cans. What they did to his clean clothes was nobody's business. His coat was ripped up the back, one sleeve torn out, his collar yanked off, his tie draped over his back, his shirt pulled up out of his pants like a Russian blouse. Hobnailed boots and rope-soled sandals scraped over him, pressing his face into the filth, rubbing the skin off his nose.

Then a hand gripped him by the scruff of the neck, hoisted him into an upright position, and flung him against the door. Groote, big and broad as a barn door confronted him.

"And you thought you could get away!" jeered the Fleming, hanging onto the baggage racks on either side of the compartment. "*Gottverdom!* You ought to be thrown out the window. Look at it," he appealed to the recruits. "Look at the little swine. It's got a few pennies and it thinks it can lord it over us. But we got him! We made him climb down off his high horse."

Loud cheers rent the air. They had no real grudge against Barney, but any excuse was a good excuse to let off steam, and yell, and tell the world they were brave, brawny lads on their way to join the Legion.

So far Groote had been the life of the party. He could drink ten bottles of wine without passing out and bellow louder than any one else. Consequently they supported him vociferously. Barney, on the other hand, after the rough treatment to which he had been subjected, looked woebegone and ridiculous, so they hooted at him and cursed him in German, French, Russian and Croat.

"I could break you in two," Groote informed him, "but you are not worth spitting on. You're going to get down on your damn knees and say you're sorry you tried to punch me this morning while I was not looking. And you're going to hand over what's left of your money to buy drinks for the crowd when we reach Lyons."

Barney was beginning to recover from the effects of his reception.

"Did you say I tried to *punch* you?" he inquired. "Why, you big hunk of cheese, I knocked you cold."

There was a metallic ring to his voice which made the recruits sit up and take notice. Every line on Barney's dirt smeared face, the look in his eyes, warned them of impending danger. It was as though a stick of dynamite with a lighted fuse had been thrown in among them.

"Nobody wants to fight," protested a stout, round-faced Bavarian. "We have plenty of time later on to fight. It is stupid!"

"He's a liar," Groote broke in. "I'll make him eat his words, on his knees. He—"

The words strangled in his throat when, abruptly, he found himself looking down the wide muzzle of an automatic Barney had whipped from its holster.

At the far end of the compartment an undersized guttersnipe with a pock-marked face cried out:

"*Pas ca*, idiot! Not that! That's murder. Put it away, for God's sake!"

"Shut up!" rasped Walsh. "When I'm through with this baboon I'll attend to you. If any man reaches for the alarm cord I'll blow his head off."

Silence weighed down upon the compartment.

"Groote," Barney went on. "I'm plenty sick of you. You been shooting off that big mouth of yours ever since I first saw you. You're nothing but a blow-hard and you know it."

"A little friendly fun, that's all it was," stammered Groote, a sickly grin on his face. "Just a little joke."

"Swell! Now you tell these birds what happened this morning. Tell 'em you tried to hold me up and I bust you one on the jaw. Spit it out."

"Well, maybe you did."

"Not that way. Give 'em the straight dope in your own words. Talk French. I can understand it even if I can't speak the doggone language."

There could be no question of evading the issue—not with that gun muzzle staring him straight in the face. Groote did as he was told. He did not go into details, nor sing hymns in praise of Barney's hitting power, but the facts themselves were so startling that they required no embellishments.

The recruits' hostility toward Barney gave way to admiration. Any man who could down a burly fellow like Groote with one punch was entitled to their respect, particularly when he held a gun in his hand.

"O. K.," nodded Barney as Groote reached the end of the confession. "That's that, but I guess you ain't happy yet, so," he slid the gun back into its holster and buttoned up what remained of his coat, "I'm going to knock your teeth down your throat, big boy, just to show these birds you ain't so hot."

He didn't wait to find out how Groote felt about it. The narrow aisle between the seats was full of legs and knees and feet, but he waded in somehow and landed a well-timed wallop on the side of Groote's bruised jaw before the latter's slow brain had fully grasped the idea that he was in no danger of dying of lead poisoning.

That blow hurt. Groote swung wildly in the general direction of his assailant, but his eyes were blurred with tears, and instead of hitting Barney, his fist bounced off the ear of a bearded and gloomy Russian, who let out a tremendous yell and promptly hurled an

empty sardine can at his head, drenching him in oil and fish scales.

After that it was a circus. There was nothing Herculean about Barney, but he was well-knit and compact, and he knew how to hit. He followed up that first punch with an uppercut that rocked Groote back on his heels and exposed his broad stomach to a volley of wicked, short-arm jolts that made him double up. His knees began to sag. In that narrow space, packed to overflowing with humanity he could not fend off his smaller, lighter antagonist. At close quarters, his arms seemed to tie themselves up in knots.

The ribald laughter of the onlookers filled him with dismay and rage. And blood squirted from his nose as Barney mashed it down on his cheek. Bellowing with indignation, he tried to fall forward upon Walsh and drag him to the ground. But it did not work.

His mouth was still wide open when Barney pounded him on the jaw—once, twice, and again. Right, left, right! And as the third blow crashed home Groote went out like a light.

A HATCHET-FACED sergeant of the Legion and two *gendarmes* greeted the recruits as they tumbled out of their compartment when the train reached Marseilles.

"Warrants!" barked the sergeant. "This way. Fall in! Don't shuffle! Hurry up, confound you!"

His voice filled the train shed, causing nearby travelers to stare in alarm at the ragged crew he was endeavoring to round up. Order and discipline laid a heavy hand upon the recruits. They were in the army now; files on parade, anonymous "bayonet units" eager to do the sergeant's bidding.

In theory, at least, that is what they ought to have been, but one and all, they were suffering from such splendid hangovers that they did not care what he said, nor how he said it.

Never had they spent such a night. At Lyons Legionnaire Barney had bought wine by the case, champagne and cognac, Scotch whisky and vodka. And great quantities of food (not stale buffet sandwiches; he abandoned those to hungry second-class passengers) but cold roast chickens, lobsters, bread by the yard, and a basket of fruit so expensive and rare that each piece was separately packed in cotton wool.

The ensuing party had been stupendous. They had sung themselves hoarse, laughed, lied, argued, fought, and smashed every pane of glass within reach. They had splintered the benches and cracked the partitions.

The sergeant who greeted them meant well, but he had rarely had to handle such a bunch of sleep-walkers. They were unbelievably foul and dirty, and their combined breaths would have asphyxiated a skunk at ten paces.

"On two ranks!" stormed the sergeant. "Get in line. Any kind of a line! Move, band of alcoholics! Wake up!"

Only one man showed some signs of intelligence, and that man was Legionnaire Groote. He stood squarely in front of the sergeant, heels together, straight-backed, stiffly erect. He had a lovely black eye and a swollen lip, but he, alone, appeared to be moderately sober.

"Amazing!" cried the sergeant. "Marvelous! Congratulations! Let me tell you I have never seen such a collection of crapulous degenerates. Come on," he bellowed. "Form up, I tell you. Stop swaying! Stand up! Look to your front!"

The *gendarmes* came to his rescue, pushing and shoving the men into some semblance of military formation.

"What has happened to them?" the sergeant protested. "They couldn't get that drunk on five francs subsistence allowance."

"No, sergeant," agreed Groote, trying to appear very solemn and righteous.

"They did not. May I have a word with you in private, sergeant? There is something I think you ought to be told."

The non-com's eyes grew round with surprise as he listened to Groote's whispered warning.

"I'm glad you told me," he declared. "You've got the right spirit, my boy. I'll mention you in my report. Now keep still while I settle this."

He held a brief consultation with the *gendarmes*. Together they bore down upon Barney who was sitting on the running board, holding his head between his fists.

They did not give him a chance to move. One *gendarme* half strangled him, the other tore open his coat and the sergeant plunged forward and wrenched Barney's automatic from its hiding place.

"Scoundrel!" thundered the sergeant. "You'll find out what it costs to carry concealed weapons before you're much older. You won't last long, I promise you—not in the Legion. Slip a pair of bracelets on his wrists," he advised the *gendarmes*. "If he wants to behave like a criminal, we'll treat him like one."

They did. Barney was marched through the sunlit streets of Marseilles in handcuffs, followed by little boys who hurled horse dirt and insults at him, much to the amusement of the *gendarmes*.

Eventually they reached Fort St. Jean, the concentration depot for all troops bound overseas. It is a grim, medieval pile, very impressive to look at, but a shade too damp and primitive for modern tastes. The cells, Barney discovered, were perfect examples of the architectural efficiency of the middle ages. They were designed neither for comfort nor sanitation, but to subject their occupants to the maximum amount of physical annoyance.

The officer commanding the depot passed sentence upon Barney almost as soon as the recruits entered the fort, for the case was too grave to be held over.

At this officer's side, when the prisoner was marched into the orderly room, stood Lieutenant d'Auclaire, resplendant in a new khaki uniform of impeccable cut.

He gave Barney one look, wrinkled his aquiline nose, and said:

"That is the man, commandant."

The commandant scrutinized Barney from head to foot, then spoke to Groote, who stood like a ramrod facing the desk.

"Let me hear what you have to say. I want facts—pertinent facts. Be brief!"

Groote, though battered, produced an excellent impression upon both officers. He was big and dumb and tongue-tied. Begging the commandant's pardon, he said, he had endeavored to subdue the recruits who, at Barney's instigation, had been destroying the railroad company's property. Thereupon Barney had drawn this gun of his and had struck him several blows with the heavy barrel, knocking him unconscious. At Lyons, Barney had purchased several hundred francs' worth of alcohol and all the recruits had become intoxicated. Barney had compelled him to drink a bottle of wine and had threatened to shoot him if he said anything, but he felt that he was doing his duty—

"That will do," the commandant broke in. "Thank you. Silence!"

Then the sergeant and the two *gendarmes* were heard, and the officer, after a brief pause, addressed himself to the culprit.

"Have you anything to say for yourself?"

"Plenty!" swore Barney. But his French was not equal to the task. "Next time I meet Groote," he began, "I'll break his jaw. The gun—"

The commandant silenced him.

"We do not want criminals in the Legion," he said in a harsh voice. "We do not need them. We do not tolerate them. You, Barney, appear to be a

criminal. Your record for the past twenty-four hours proves this conclusively. You have insulted an officer, threatened to kill one of your comrades, and behaved so disgracefully that from Paris to Marseilles protests and complaints began pouring into this office even before you arrived. And you were found carrying a lethal weapon in a specially devised pocket. Barney," he leaned forward, threatening the prisoner with a long, bony forefinger, "you are a menace to all who come in contact with you. I wish I had the power to get rid of you at once. I have not. I must keep you, though I am morally certain you will be a failure and a nuisance. I have never heard of a criminal who was not a coward at heart. And cowards do not last long where you are going. They die. Whatever you may have been in the past, today you are a Legionnaire. Either you decide to live a clean and decent life, or else you will suffer. I am going to give you one last chance to think it over. Until the boat sails for Oran, you will be kept in solitary confinement. You will cross the sea in irons, and if any further punishment is considered necessary, it will be inflicted upon you at the Sidi-bel-Abbes depot."

"It's a frame-up," protested Barney. "Groote's a liar!"

"March him away," snapped the commandant, and for the next ten days Barney lived on a diet of bean soup, bread and water, in an underground cell, where battalions of voracious vermin attacked him in mass formation.

IT WAS a crazy idea. Neither Legionnaire Barney, nor Karkovski, nor Waldeman, had started out with the slightest intention of going to the theater.

To be precise, they were on their way from the café of the Widow Brulot, where they had imbibed great quantities of red wine, to a grog shop at the corner of the street of the leather works, where, according to Legionnaire Waldeman, there was a troup of Ouled-Nail dancing girls whose performance was very fine indeed.

But they never reached their destination. They were meandering past the theater when Legionnaire Karkovski fell into a trance before a billboard which announced in flamboyant language the first sensational showing of the most famous drama of all time, "The Count of Monte Cristo."

"I read it," he announced, and tears streamed down his cheeks into his great black beard. "Years ago. When I was a little boy. I had a French governess in those days—"

"I know," scoffed Barney. "The estate on the steppes, the snow, the sleighs, the baronial hall, the peasants, the war, the revolution, the red army, the white army, the flight to Constantinople, the flight to Paris, the pangs of hunger, the wish to die, the Legion. Baloney!"

Karkovski stared at him open-mouthed.

"Who told you?" he gasped.

"You did, fifty times," retorted Barney. "Come on, if we're going."

The Russian refused to budge. "I read it," he repeated sorrowfully. "It was very beautiful."

"And look," added Waldeman, "there's eight vaudeville turns straight from the leading halls of Paris, so it says. That ought to be worth seeing."

"After all—why not?" agreed Barney. "I ain't been to a movie since Detroit."

The sound of the word "Detroit" gave him a queer twinge of apprehension. All that lay behind him. It was done with, forgotten, and dead. He felt as though he had been in the Legion for years on end, and only with an effort could he realize that less than four months had gone by since he had enlisted.

Whether or not the Intelligence De-

partment of the Legion was aware of his past misdeeds is an open question. Possibly it was, for the Legion, although it takes in all-comers and asks no questions, is remarkably well informed in most cases as to the antecedents of its recruits—not because it is particularly curious or fussy, but because it must guard against agitators, spies, and other secret agents whose presence in its midst might do a great deal of harm.

Barney fitted into none of these categories, but the colonel in command of the training battalion at Sidi-bel-Abbes had decided that this particular recruit was in need of a stiff dose of discipline.

"You ought to be placed in prison," the colonel informed him. "Had you committed your crimes within my jurisdiction that is where you would be sent. You will do twenty-eight days ordinary arrest to teach you to respect the more elementary decencies we expect of all our men."

There was nothing ordinary about that period of ordinary arrest. Leather-lunged drill instructors made him sweat blood. They draped sixty pounds of kit on his back, hung a bayonet and an entrenching tool and two great cartridge pouches around his waist, shoved a Lebel rifle in his hands, and taught him the rudiments of his new trade on a parade ground where the heat—it was mid-June—was so intense that every breath he drew scorched his lungs.

At night and between drill periods he was locked in a cell. Aching from head to foot, half starved, so exhausted that he could scarcely crawl, more than once he had been on the brink of rebellion, but those drill instructors were experts. He didn't stand a chance. They knew exactly what to expect, and when to expect it, and they steam rollered him with a thoroughness that compelled his grudging admiration.

And he learned fast. At the end of his third week he drilled like a veteran, but even then the Powers That Be did not trust him. Because of a loose button on his tunic he did another two weeks' stretch, and then eight more days because of a broken shoe lace.

After that he was turned over to a regular company. But he had learned his lesson. The Legion's iron-bound code of discipline controlled his every action; nevertheless, for the first time in many years, he felt free. He worked like a coolie, ate like a lumberjack, slept soundly, and when the occasion permitted, guzzled red wine by the gallon.

He was so completely at peace with his surroundings that even his grudge against Groote had lost all significance. The Belgian had been transferred to the base at Marakech, and Barney had far too much to do to bother about a man stationed hundreds of kilometers away. In fact, he was too pleased with life to bother about anything or anybody. Off duty, when a midnight pass could be wangled out of the platoon sergeant, he explored the byways of Sidi-bel-Abbes with his cronies, Waldeman and Karkovski, and if occasionally they painted the town a little too red and ended up in the guardroom, no one thought any the worse of them for that. Legionnaires are no different from other human beings: they have to let off steam now and then.

That night, however, when they invaded the Theatre du Globe, according to their standards, they had not even started to quench their thirst.

The *mademoiselle* at the booking office gave them a look so blighting that they ought to have shriveled up. Didn't they realize, she demanded acidly, that this was a gala night? The gallery was packed. There was not an inch of standing-room left. And anyway, the feature picture was almost over.

In common with most of the civilians of Sidi-bel-Abbes, whose livelihood depends upon the pennies of Legionnaires, she despised and distrusted them. She would not have cracked a smile on a bet,

but Barney refused to be turned down.

"Who said gallery to you, my little cabbage?" he inquired. "We are not difficult to please. What's the matter with the first balcony?"

The first balcony, his little cabbage retorted, was sold out, and, she added spitefully, it was out of bounds to the rank and file. And so were the orchestra seats.

"Would you like a box?" she inquired loftily, sitting back and patting her frizzy hair with a queenly gesture. "That is the one thing I can offer you. It is very expensive."

She was due for a shock. From his pocket Barney fished a crumpled thousand franc note which he smoothed out on the counter. It was the last of his loot, but he did not give a damn.

"A box, darling, is just what we want," he assured her. "We couldn't possibly think of associating with the common herd. It will have to be a box or nothing."

They got the box. The mademoiselle ought to have been more cautious, but she was the daughter of Monsieur the Director of the theatre, and she could not resist the temptation of overcharging these insufferably common Legionnaires. The sides of the box would shield them from direct observation. If they behaved properly, no one would notice them.

"If you are not quiet," she informed them as she counted out the change, "you will be thrown out. The place is packed with officers tonight and there are plenty of policemen on hand."

"Three little mice," promised Waldeman, placing a finger over his lips and rolling his eyes. "That's us."

"Ghosts!" added Karkovski, entering the theater on the tips of his hobnailed boots. "Watch us flit."

They flitted so cautiously that immediately upon entering the box they became snarled up in the spindle-legged chairs and almost wrecked the place. Karkovski was writhing on the floor when the film ended, while Waldeman and Barney, solemn as a pair of judges, sat side by side on the remains of an overturned chair.

They had seen nothing but they applauded vigorously, and Karkovski, heaving himself off the floor, said in a choked voice:

"It was beautiful. It all comes back to me now—"

"Best show in town," agreed Barney. Let's have a drink."

They did not get it. The whole audience was acutely aware of their presence. The cream of the town's shopkeeping class, gathered in the orchestra seats, glared at the noisy trio. Hoots and catcalls came from the rabble in the gallery. And all at once a head popped around the end of the partition between the boxes. It was a very handsome head with patent leather hair and a tooth brush mustache and glittering black eyes.

"You!" ejaculated the head on catching sight of Barney.

Legionnaire Barney sprang to his feet. The chair uptilted and Waldeman slithered to the floor, dragging Karkovski down with him. More noise. Loud protests from the orchestra, great guffaws from the gallery. But Barney stood motionless in the midst of the commotion, for that head was the exclusive property of Lieutenant Edouard d'Auclaire, whom he recognized instantly although he had not seen him since the day of his arrival at Marseilles.

What that exasperated countenance clamored for was a good, swift wallop, but Barney kept his hands down where they belonged, his little fingers touching the seams of his trousers even as it is prescribed in the manual of military training. His personal opinion had ceased to count. D'Auclaire was an officer, as such he was entitled to impersonal obedience and respect.

"Sorry, *mon lieutenant,*" snapped Bar-

ney. "An accident. It was dark when we entered the box and—"

"Drunk, I suppose," retorted d'Auclaire. "If I hear another sound I shall have you arrested."

As he vanished Monsieur the Director, in person, invaded the box. He, too, threatened to have the troopers arrested, but he relented when Barney paid about ten times the value of the broken chair.

"If I hear one sound from this box during the vaudeville performance," he warned them as he departed, "I will summon the police and have you thrown out."

In a chastened mood the three Legionnaires watched a troupe of acrobats stumble through their act.

"If you've had enough," said Barney, "let's go."

But the next minute he was sitting on the edge of his seat, staring at a girl in an abbreviated dress, who came dancing out of the wings with a soldier's cap over one ear and a toy rifle on her shoulder.

First she sang one of the Legion's marching songs, then a ballad of moonlight and love, and wound up with an epic poem extolling the glories of a soldier's life. Her voice was rather thin, but she was attractive and full of pep, and she brought down the house. Great roars of applause rolled from the gallery; gallant young officers clapped until they must have burst the seams of their gloves, the civilians themselves shouted "Bravo!" and "*Encore!*" and "*Bis!*"

"*Wunderbach!*" cried Waldeman. "She must sing again. What beautiful legs she has once!"

"Legs worthy of a Slav!" admitted Karkovski. "In Moscow I knew a girl whose voice— What!" he exclaimed, turning toward Barney. "You are not leaving now? What is it? Are you sick?"

"Me—sick?" echoed Barney. "Don't be a nut. Listen, fellows: I know that jane. You bet. Name of Marie-Louise Cluny. I got to see her. She steered me into this outfit, see. She's O. K. I got a hunch she came here to see me." He grinned fatuously. "Ain't that something? Wait here. I'll be back. I'm going to throw a party for that kid if I have to spend every cent I got."

HE WAS on his way before they had a chance to speak. Behind the scenes every one objected violently to his presence, but one and all—ushers, call boys, stage hands, firemen and managers—they succumbed to their highly developed instinct of acquisition. Barney lavished money upon them, dealing out hundred franc notes until his wallet grew limp and flat. Before the end of the last encore, he greased the last itching palm and reached Marie-Louise's dressing-room. He had the place to himself for maids were an unheard of luxury at Sidi-bel-Abbes.

And was Marie-Louise surprised when she burst into the room, breathless with triumph, and found him lolling in the arm chair as though he owned the theatre? Surprise does not begin to do justice to the strength and depth of her emotions.

The bright and merry smile she wore as she crossed the threshold changed to a look of intense suspicion, then to astonishment and irritation.

Her first words were:

"*Mon Dieu!* It is Barnee. I did not recognize you—but not at all. So black you are! And that uniform, it is uglee!"

"What did you expect?" laughed Barney. "Gold braid and a row of medals? Gimme time. Say, kid, this is certainly swell!"

She did not seem to share his enthusiasm. Instead of taking his outstretched hands, she backed away, glancing over her shoulder at the door.

"You must not stay 'ere," she said emphatically. "I am veree soree, but

you must go. It is wrong. I am expecting somebodee. . . ."

"And that somebody is me," caroled Barney, who could not get it through his thick head that his presence in that dressing room was not at all welcome.

"It is not you," she retorted, stamping her pretty foot. "It is all finish' between us. I can not 'ave you 'ere."

"But I thought—"

"Ah, là, là!" cried Marie-Louise, planting her fists on her hips, fishwife style. "You t'ink, you t'ink! Stupid one. Me —come here to see you! You are the lunatic. Once, perhaps, I like you—but not when I find out what you are. A gangster!" She shuddered in her best theatrical manner. "I am 'orribly afraid. I am finish' with you, *hein?* What are you to me? Not'ing! So get out!"

She meant just that.

"For the love of Mike," exclaimed Barney, suddenly returning to earth with a mighty jolt. "But look here, sister. I ain't a crook now. . . ."

That was the least of Marie-Louise's worries. She had not journeyed all the way from Paris to Sidi-bel-Abbes to be pestered by a low scoundrel like Barney. He had caused her so much mental anguish that she remembered him without the slightest pleasure. For several days after he had enlisted, the papers had played up his story, printing sensational and inaccurate lists of his misdeeds. They swore he had been rescued by members of his gang, and the two detectives who had tried to arrest him became national heroes overnight: France's first line of defence against the invasion of American thugs.

It was a situation well calculated to give a hard-working *artiste* a bad attack of nerves, particularly when she heard that her friend Michaud had committed suicide, and that a foreigner by the name of Tony Varella, of Detroit, Michigan, had fallen off the Cherbourg boat train and had died of a broken neck. The newspapers established no connection between these minor affairs and the shooting of the two detectives, but to Marie-Louise, the connection was painfully clear. The Sureté Générale had avenged its colleagues in its usual businesslike fashion without going to the trouble and expense of a trial by jury.

Marie-Louise had spent many a sleepless night—ruinous to her complexion—wondering whether her turn would come next, but nothing had happened, and she had become so wrought up that one morning she had put on her new summer dress and had marched into the police commissioner's office to make a clean breast of all she knew.

The commissioner had been very sympathetic. He had patted her hand and had assured her that everything was quite all right. He seemed to know all about Barney.

"If he is in the Legion," he smiled, "we'll let him stay there. He committed no crime in this country, and of course we can not deport a French soldier. But I do not pretend to have any accurate information in accordance with the request of the American authorities. That is the official thesis. Bear it in mind and act accordingly, and I am sure you will have no cause for regret."

And that had been the end of that.

Plain common or garden curiosity and the prospect of a steady six weeks' job had impelled her to accept an engagement at the Theatre du Globe. She had intended to tell Barney what she thought of him at the first opportunity, but her success with the young officers of the garrison had been so instantaneous that she had forgotten all about him.

His unexpected presence in her dressing room filled her with dismay. If any of her aristocratic admirers found a soldier of the second class on the premises they would certainly cut her dead.

"If you do not leave at once," she cried shrilly, "I shall call for help. I 'ate you! I know what you 'ave done in America."

"I guess that lets me out," shrugged Barney. "It's O. K. by me, sister."

"You 'ad no right to come 'ere," she swore, unable to leave well enough alone. "Bandit and assassin that you are. Beast!"

She flung open the door with a sweeping gesture worthy of the great Sarah Bernhardt in her prime, and on the threshold, with his knuckles crooked, ready for a discreet knock, stood Lieutenant Edouard d'Auclaire, bearing a huge bunch of red, red roses in his arm.

Marie-Louise promptly let out a melodious wail and burst into tears, for d'Auclaire was the most eligible bachelor in town.

He was slightly stunned when he saw Barney standing in the middle of the room, but his self-control was perfect. He came in, closed the door, and placed his flowers on a chair. Without condescending to notice Barney, who was making a half-hearted attempt to stand at attention, he appealed to Marie-Louise.

"Do you not think, *mademoiselle,*" he said with freezing politeness, "that I am entitled to an explanation?"

She flung herself into his arms.

"It is terrible," she sobbed. "I found him here. He will not go away. I can not rid myself of him."

D'Auclaire disengaged himself, and held her at arm's length.

"You—ah—happen to be acquainted with this—ah—soldier?" he inquired with all the formal courtesy of a judge about to pass sentence of death upon a prisoner.

On the spur of the moment, Marie-Louise followed the line of least resistance.

"I have never set eyes on him before," she declared. "I can't imagine what he wants. Do make him go away! I am very frightened!"

She tried to fly into another clinch, but d'Auclaire sidestepped gracefully, and Barney made matters worse for the unfortunate girl by refusing to let her get away with that story.

"Let's get this thing straight—" he began.

"Speak when you are spoken to," snapped d'Auclaire, "and do me the favor of addressing me in French, *if* you please."

Had he slung a handful of mud in Barney's face, he could not have made his contempt more emphatic.

"Don't listen to him," begged Marie-Louise, fearing the worst.

"Sorry," drawled the lieutenant, whose self-respect demanded that he know the worst. "This—er—man may wish to make a statement before I summon the police."

"I do, *mon lieutenant,*" agreed Barney. "Mademoiselle says she has never seen me. She is mistaken. I met her in Paris—"

Marie-Louise did not give him an opportunity to finish what he had to say. Wise girl that she was, she jumped into the breach and told the truth, the whole truth, and a great deal more than the truth. Her elocutionary talent stood her in good stead. When it came to talking she could run rings around Barney.

He had tried to lure her into marriage, she cried, but she had repulsed his advances, for she had never really believed he was a wealthy businessman. And then she had discovered that he was the notorious Walsh—Barney Walsh—the American gangster! She had been so upset that she had to break her contract and go into a nursing home. He was to blame if today she wasn't playing stellar roles at the Comedie Francaise!

"Very interesting, indeed, I'm sure," commented d'Auclaire, smoothing his little mustache with his finger tips. "And you, Legionnaire—er—Barney, or whatever your name is, have you anything to add?"

Barney had no desire to get into an argument with the lieutenant. His one

ambition was to leave that room without delay and rejoin Waldeman and Karkovski.

"I guess I made a mistake, *mon lieutenant,*" he confessed. "I saw *mademoiselle* on the stage and I thought I'd like to say hello. But since she doesn't want to have anything to do with me I. . . ."

"I hate him!" interjected Marie-Louise.

D'Auclaire, with perfect poise, led her to a chair and begged her to be seated. Then he faced Barney and drawled:

"My good fellow, you bore me. You bore me desperately. You are an insufferable nuisance. Your presence irks me. Whichever way I turn, apparently, I must contend with you, and I have had enough of it."

Barney kept his mouth tight shut. Four months in the Legion had made a new man of him. So long as he stayed on the right side of the law and kept out of prison he did not give a damn what d'Auclaire thought or said or did.

"You are," d'Auclaire went on, "the most noisome creatures it has ever been my misfortune to meet. I have often wondered what one of these American gangsters looked like—one of those beastly murderers who—"

"With all due respect, *mon lieutenant,*" Barney broke in, "may I remind you that you are speaking to No. 93,883, Legionnaire Barney, W.?"

That rebuke stung d'Auclaire. He had been guilty of a gross infringement of Legion etiquette, but it was too late to mend matters. His long, flat cheeks turned a dark red.

"You would not interest me in the least," he retorted, "if you had not broken into this room and terrified this lady. This becomes a personal matter. To protect mademoiselle's good name I can not afford to have you arrested, but it would give me great pleasure, as man to man, to thrash you with the utmost severity."

Marie-Louise's heart missed a beat. She had won a great moral victory. For her sake d'Auclaire was ready to rend Barney limb from limb!

"*Mon lieutenant,*" Barney protested, "I tell you it was a mistake. I don't want to fight you, or anybody else. Man to man—nothing! You're an officer, I'm a Legionnaire. . . ."

"You're not, you're a cheap and nasty coward," d'Auclaire informed him. "Very brave with a gun, of course; ready to victimize unarmed citizens and to break into a lady's dressing room, but cringing with fear when—"

"You can't have it both ways," snapped Barney, his patience beginning to wear thin. "If I am a Legionnaire you have no right—"

"That's just it," said d'Auclaire. "*If.* Didn't I say a moment ago that you were a coward? That term is never applied to Legionnaires."

"All I'm trying to do is to keep out of prison," Barney said desperately. "That's the long and short of it."

"Very well," nodded the lieutenant, casting a sidelong glance at Marie-Louise's ecstatic countenance. "If you want to keep out of prison you will stand up and take your thrashing like a man."

"Here?"

It was not without good reason that d'Auclaire had acquired the reputation of being one of the most hot-headed and tempestuous subalterns in the army.

"Here and now!" he declared, "unless *mademoiselle* objects."

She did not object. She was thrilled. Clasping his roses in her arms, she egged him on with a brave and beautiful smile.

"Splendid!" laughed d'Auclaire. "Now my good gangster friend, let us see how you fight empty handed. Are you ready?"

THE proceedings, of course, were wholly contrary to good order and military discipline, but d'Auclaire did not mind a little thing like that. Though he was an officer and a gentleman, he did not

hesitate to trade blows with Barney, not only for Marie-Louise's sake, but because it was the third time he had come in direct and unpleasant contact with this infamous upstart. Only in this fashion, he felt, could Barney be put in his place, taught to respect his superiors, and made to keep out of their way.

The one unfortunate drawback to d'Auclaire's scheme was that he had learned the noble art of self-defence in the gymnasium at the military academy, where he had learned to box so scientifically and so well that he had won the school's middleweight championship three years in succession.

Barney, on the other hand, had learned all he knew about scrapping at the school of Hard Knocks. He did not fight to score points; he fought to rock his opponents to sleep as quickly as possible. But he could not make himself believe that the lieutenant intended to hit him . . . not until d'Auclaire's left flashed out like a rapier and landed crisply on his nose.

Marie-Louise gasped. Overcome with terror and delight, she buried her face in the roses, following the contest through a small gap in the mass of fragrant red petals.

D'Auclaire pranced about, light on his toes as a toreador. Again his left shot out and connected with Barney's right eyebrow. He stepped back, shaking his head, unwilling even then to strike his superior officer. It was too damned easy. D'Auclaire's well molded chin loomed before him, large as all outdoors.

"Oh, no you don't!" exclaimed the lieutenant, who was enjoying himself to the utmost. "I am not through with you yet! You're not going to run away."

He ducked, feinted with his left, and uncorked a perfect right with plenty of steam behind it, which landed on Barney's ear and sent him sprawling.

"Say, listen!" he protested, sitting by the wall, nursing his ear. "Call it a day, will you? I'm licked. It's O. K. by me."

"Get up," ordered d'Auclaire. "You are not even hurt."

"Aw, what's the use?"

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders. A look of intense disgust swept across his handsome countenance.

"You see," he told Marie-Louise. "A whipped cur would put up a better fight. I was right when I said he was a filthy coward. He is not fit to wear the Legion's uniform. If he had one spark of manhood—"

Barney got up.

"You been asking for it," he said in a level voice. "Now you're going to get it."

He didn't feint, duck or weave. Flat footed, his arms hanging at his sides, he bore down upon d'Auclaire.

"So you have changed your mind at last!" cried the lieutenant. "So much the better!"

Out shot that flashing left of his, that famous left that had scored so many championship points, straight from the shoulder. It landed squarely on Barney's chin. And Barney kept right on coming. D'Auclaire, slightly taken aback, broke away, skipped about on his toes, and sent over a sizzling right, which crashed against the top of Barney's head. And still Barney kept on coming.

The lieutenant was not used to such tactics. They rattled him. He was acutely conscious of Marie-Louise's presence. She was watching the show with both eyes now, watching him intently, waiting for him to do something marvelous and heroic.

He did his best to please her, jabbing his left into Barney's face several times in quick succession, then, gritting his teeth, packing every last ounce of his strength into the punch, he slung a long, swinging right at his antagonist's jaw.

And the next thing he knew he lay beneath the dressing table, wondering what it was all about. His mouth was full of blood. His stomach felt as though

it had been kicked by a mule. All the wind had been driven out of his lungs and several seconds elapsed before he could do more than lie still, all curled up around his aching stomach, gasping and wheezing as he tried to catch his breath.

Marie-Louise's screams rent the air. For her sake, although his head was spinning around and around at an alarming rate, he struggled to his knees.

"It—it's nothing," he gulped. "I am quite all right, really."

He looked around and saw Barney standing with one hand on the doorknob.

"Don't you dare leave this room," he ordered. "Wait!"

"As man to man," said Barney, "let me tell you something. You couldn't fight a one-armed paralytic. You socked me and I socked you. The ball game's over. Good night."

He saluted as woodenly as though he had been on parade, and marched out of the room—straight into a large, silent gathering of officers, stage hands and chorus girls, who had been listening intently to the sounds of strife filtering through the thin partitions.

All those bystanders had been under the impression that two of Marie-Louise's suitors had come to blows, but these suitors were supposed to be of equal rank, and, to avoid a scandal which might have led the authorities to forbid young officers to go back stage, every one had agreed to a policy of non-interference.

The theater was one of the very few places in that small, gossip-ridden garrison town where subalterns could amuse themselves without running the risk of being squelched. They made a point of honor of settling their differences in private, and more duels had had their inception in that hectic environment than in any other spot in North Africa.

But Barney was a very different proposition. The unwritten code of the Theatre du Globe did not apply to him. On the contrary. In the memory of living man no Legionnaire had ever been seen back-stage. Angry mutterings greeted his appearance. The mutterings grew louder and more indignant when the goggle-eyed crowd beheld d'Auclaire on his knees by the dressing table, looking dazed and disheveled, with a thread of blood trickling out of his mouth.

Marie-Louise added piquancy to the situation by having hysterics. The chorus girls in the passage, overcome with excitement and heat, followed suit, shrieking their heads off.

The uproar became deafening when Barney tried to squeeze his way through the crowd. A solid wall of humanity confronted him, and one of the scene shifters, whose palm he had crossed with silver, salved his conscience by slugging him behind the ear.

"Let him go!" croaked d'Auclaire, tottering unsteadily across the room.

He might as well have saved his breath. His shout merely added to the general confusion.

"Don't you worry," one of his colleagues assured him. "We won't let him go. He'll pay for this, the blackguard!"

Beyond a shadow of a doubt Barney paid. If left to themselves the officers would not have resorted to physical violence, but they were not alone. They were surrounded by angry civilians who asked for nothing better than an opportunity to take a crack at the alleged culprit.

Blows rained upon Barney. He was kicked, scratched, and belabored. He did not want to fight, but in self-defence he had to. And when he swung into action, flattening out an electrician who was making passes at his head with a monkey wrench, girls fled in panic, bawling for help, breaking up the show, forcing the management to ring down the curtain.

Barney did not last long. In that narrow, ill lighted corridor he was pinned against the wall and smothered beneath sheer weight of numbers. Battered to a pulp, he slipped to the floor and his assailants were using him as a spring board when the town picket, summoned by the director, arrived and restored some semblance of order at the bayonet point.

Of the ensuing scandal, of the townspeople's indignation, of the violent editorials in the local press, of the commandant's proclamations, no words filtered through to Barney for many days. For a month he lay on a cot in the prison infirmary recovering from a multiplicity of injuries ranging from a broken arm to a lacerated scalp in which the surgeon had to take twenty-two stitches.

"I asked for it," he told the ward orderly in a burst of confidence. "There I was, sitting pretty, having a swell time, and then everything went haywire. But that guy d'Auclaire—he ought to have had more brains. An officer trying to fight! Why, the poor mutt's just a big hunk of mush. He couldn't take it. None of 'em can. If I go to prison—"

"There's no 'if' about it," the orderly assured him. "After what happened at the theater? My old one, when you come out of prison d'Auclaire will be a divisional general, retired on half pay."

But he was wrong. Once again, by the skin of his teeth, Barney escaped court-martial, and the long shadow of prison gates which had hung over him so many years once more faded away, leaving him almost unscathed.

Almost, but not quite. The day of his discharge from hospital he was marched before the colonel, who did not seem at all pleased to see him.

"Legionnaire Barney," said the Colonel, "your record is an abomination. Apparently, you are incapable of behaving like a soldier, but—" here he paused and busied himself for some moments with the papers on his desk—"in this instance I find you are not wholly to blame. Certain incidents of a private character took place between you and Sublieutenant d'Auclaire. Because these incidents occurred in private I can not take official cognizance of them, but—" again he fussed with his papers—"I want you to remember this; there can be no private relationship between you and your superior officer. It is against the letter and spirit of army discipline. Therefore—" he cleared his throat rather noisily—"if you want to bring charges against Sublieutenant d'Auclaire, you are free to do so."

"I have no charges to make against anyone, *mon colonel,*" snapped Barney.

The colonel's leathery face relaxed, and a faint gleam of approval showed in his eyes.

"Is that final?" he demanded. "Because, I warn you, there are charges against you I do not intend to dismiss."

"That is final, *mon colonel,*" Barney said stolidly.

"Very well." The colonel drew a deep breath. "Sublieutenant d'Auclaire has already been dealt with, and punished for his share in this disgraceful affair. You, Legionnaire, are guilty of having caused a disturbance in a public place. In view of the injuries inflicted upon you during the disturbance, you will be confined to barracks for a period of two weeks. And don't let such a thing happen again—ever!"

It was as though a crushing load had been lifted off Barney's shoulders. Instead of being treated like an incorrigible criminal, instead of being reminded of his unsavory past, he was being treated justly and mercifully.

"Thank you, *mon colonel,*" he blurted out. "I—"

"*Disposez*—dismiss!" rasped the colonel. "And don't let me find your name on a crime sheet again unless you want to spend the rest of your days cracking stones!"

IN A smother of dust the column skirted the town of Ain Fezzoul, and climbed at a snail's pace up the slope toward the loopholed walls of the fort sharply outlined against the morning sky.

It had been a hard grind. In four days the convoy had crossed a hundred and fifty kilometers of arid, sundrenched desert, but that last mile up the hill was the hardest of all. The transport mules, straining at their breaststraps, lurched and stumbled, unable to make any headway against the deadweight of the heavily laden wagons. Legionnaires, their lips cracked and swollen for want of water, strained at the wheel spokes, hoisting the wagons over boulders and rock ledges, forcing them forward foot by foot.

By the side of the trail, impassive and enigmatic, Arab goatherds leaned on their staffs and watched the white soldiers toil.

Waldeman mopped the sweat out of his eyes and cursed angrily.

"What do they think we are—coolies? Why don't they put those black fellows to work? I'm sick of it!"

"Do your stuff and quit bellyaching," retorted Barney, straining at a wheel spoke. "The sooner we reach the fort the sooner we drink."

Grunting beneath the weight of his pack, hampered by his rifle, Waldeman shoved half-heartedly at the tail end of a cart.

"I was a fool to enlist," he declared. "Legionnaires are cheap. Look at what we have been through. No chance to eat or sleep, and not enough water."

"We'll get you a Pullman next time," promised Barney. "Nobody asked you to join this outfit. There's worse places, I'm telling you."

Karkovski, limping along on bleeding feet, spat out a mouthful of dust.

"It's the way they treat you," he complained. He jerked his bearded chin in the direction of Lieutenant d'Auclaire, who was trotting up to the gateway to the fort. "Look at him up there. Too conceited even to notice us. I'll bet he's never had a blistered heel. No, and I'll be he's never gone thirsty, either. In the old Russian army—"

"Yeah, the old Russian army," nodded Barney. "And look what happened to it! What do you expect an officer to do? Kiss you good night and tuck you in bed?"

"I suppose you like to be treated like a dog," complained Karkovski. "The way you talk, you might think you hadn't spent a month in hospital because of that tailor's dummy. You have a short memory."

"Like hell I have," snorted Barney. "But that cootie ain't the whole Legion, not by a long shot. I ain't worrying about him. He got it in the neck same as I did. They sent him out here instead of letting him play polo, or what have you, at Rabat. That ought to hold him for a while."

"It is a punishment for him," Waldeman said gloomily, "but for us it is all in the day's work."

That four-day hike had left its mark upon the twenty recruits sent to replace casualties at Ain Fezzoul. Their first contact with the real desert had had a demoralizing effect upon them. Brought up in congested cities, they were unprepared for such an experience. At railhead, where they had joined the supply column, they had left behind all familiar landmarks and had trudged out across the limitless plain, where nothing grew except tufts of blue-green *alfa* grass; a wilderness of stone and rock and drifting sand.

The barrenness of their surroundings had dismayed the recruits, and as the miles slipped away beneath their hobnailed boots an enormous silence closed in upon them. It made them aware of their complete isolation from the world they knew, of their helplessness. If they

lost contact with the column, if they strayed from the trail, their fate was sealed. Death marched close beside them, ready to strike at the first sign of weakness.

They had kept their thoughts to themselves while they were on the trail, but from the moment they had sighted the red walls of Ain Fezzoul they had been so relieved and delighted that their pent up uneasiness had come boiling over, and they had cursed themselves, the Legion, and the country at large with blistering oaths.

Barney, however, had nothing to regret. Detroit and Nick Tulesco, Federal agents and French detectives—all these had been left far behind. It was as though a door had been shut and bolted upon his past.

"Sure, it's all in the day's work," he told Waldeman. "This dump don't look so bad. If it's got a canteen and a shower bath, that's all I want."

There was a canteen at the fort, the showers were in good working order, but Barney soon discovered to his bitter disgust that Ain Fezzoul was no haven of rest for the weary Legionnaire.

As the troopers straggled into the fort they were greeted by an adjutant who brayed orders at them in a furiously angry voice. Spindle shanked, raw boned, gawky, with a small, mean head perched on a skinny neck, he was the prototype of all the dumbest, most narrow-minded virtues a non-commissioned officer can posses. And if Ain Fezzoul was reputed one of the most dismal hell-holes in South Morocco it was largely due to the influence of this paragon among adjutants, Emile Casto.

It didn't take him long to show the incoming Legionnaires what kind of treatment they might expect from him. They were dog-tired, they were thirsty, their backs ached, but Casto did not believe in mollycoddling his men.

"Look alive!" he bellowed. "Fall in on two ranks. Move, you hunks of living putrescence. On the double!"

They didn't move fast enough to suit him. Punishments rained upon them. Five days' detention, two days ordinary arrest, a week's defaulters' drill. That was his idea of discipline, that was his way of showing them that they were dealing with a real adjutant now, not with the weak-kneed drill instructors of the depot.

In five minutes he had the Legionnaires so bewildered that they could not make head or tail of his orders.

"As fine a bunch of gallows fodder as I ever laid eyes on," he proclaimed as they formed up outside the one-storied office building. "You, *salopard* that thou art!" he suddenly pounced upon Karkovski, who had shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "Don't you know better than to move on parade? Seven days' extra drill for you. Stand steady!"

"My boots—" began Karkovski.

"Silence!" roared Casto. "Ten days instead of seven. Shut your lousy trap and stand steady!"

He kept them standing at attention in the full glare of the sun for a quarter of an hour, until the District Commander, Captain Riverain, condescended to step out of the office and review the incoming draft.

That part of the program was soon over.

"All present or accounted for, *mon capitaine!*" boomed the adjutant, bringing his heels together with a tremendous smack and carrying his hand to the vizor of his cap. "Recruits all of them, I regret to say. They won't be much use to us until we can lick them into shape."

Riverain stood for a moment with his hands clasped behind his back, gnawing at his ragged gray mustache while he stared at the troopers, then with a slight shrug and a nod he turned and went back into the office.

"Platoon leaders!" shouted Casto. "This way. Double march!"

FOUR sergeants, who had been standing to one side, dashed forward and came to a halt, heads up, chests expanded, staring into space with the fixidity of cigar store Indians. Four sergeants after Casto's own heart.

"No. 1 Platoon take the first five men!" ordered Casto.

The sergeant on the right of the line came to life.

"First five," he roared with martial vigor, as though the men were a couple of miles away. "Slope arms. . . . Right face. . . . Quick march! Sheep!" he yelled at them. "Pick up those feet. Step out! Faster! I'll teach you to shamble! Double march!"

Barney's turn came with the third group. A familiar figure loomed up in front of him, a familiar voice bellowed in his ear . . . and all at once he found himself looking straight into the eyes of Otto Groote; Groote with a sergeant's silver stripe on his sleeve; Groote, bigger, more corpulent than ever, literally bursting with pride and self importance.

Recognition was mutual and instantaneous. For one split second Groote's eyes seemed about to pop from his head and a sly grin distended his broad, full lipped mouth. Then the grin vanished; glaring at his five troopers he hurled orders at them as Casto had taught him to do—as though he were daring them to disobey under penalty of death.

They were so weary of being shouted at that they moved woodenly without making the slightest effort to put any snap into their movements.

The adjutant barked at them:

"That won't do! How did these dopes get into the Legion? Get 'em, Groote. Make 'em sit up!"

Groote got them. He had earned his stripes in a remarkably short space of time by patterning his behavior upon the adjutant's, who couldn't give a single order without cursing and ranting until he was on the verge of apoplexy.

A dozen times Groote had made his squad slope arms, ground arms, and slope arms again until their knees began to give way and their eyes were glassy with exhaustion.

"You're rotten," he informed them. "What you need is a couple of weeks of pack drill, and I am the man, my boys, to see you do it. Forward!"

Outside the hutments he brought them to a halt. There, as last, he condescended to notice Barney.

"So you've turned up," he commented, hooking his thumbs in his belt and sauntering up so close that he seemed to tread on Barney's feet. "You're a bad actor, Legionnaire Barney. A gangster with blood on your hands. You're a criminal. But I won't miss you if you try any of your tricks. Let's have a look at your military booklet."

Barney handed it over without a word. Every French soldier carries this booklet wherever he goes. It contains a detailed account of his record—crimes and punishments, acts of bravery and rewards.

Groote gave a loud snort.

"You haven't changed! 'Injured while creating a disturbance in a public place.' 'One month in prison infirmary.' *Gott-verdom!* we'll have to keep an eye on you. Here, take the filthy thing, it's not fit to touch."

He did not wait for Barney to take the booklet. He dropped it on the ground.

"Pick it up!" he ordered. "At once."

Barney, tight-lipped and silent, did as he was told, not promptly enough, however, to please Groote who shouted in his face:

"I'll have you up for insolent behavior if you're not careful. You're too slow for this outfit. You need limbering up. Bend over and touch your toes ten times."

Even then Barney voiced no complaint. He carried out the stupid order without the slightest hesitation, and

when he straightened up there was no trace of emotion on his sweat-streaked, dust-caked face.

"That's much better," crowed Groote, all puffed up with his own power. "It's a good thing for you, my lad, you've acquired some sense. We make short work of soreheads up here, and don't you forget it."

Then he led the way into the hut, showed the newcomers to their cots, and marched out with all the pompous dignity of a barroom bouncer.

With the exception of the room orderly, who was scrubbing the floor, the hut was empty. The rest of the platoon was on fatigue duty helping to unload the transport wagons.

"What's the matter with this outfit?" Waldeman demanded as soon as Groote was out of earshot. "Do they think they're herding wild animals in a zoo?"

The orderly sat down on the end of a cot, holding the mop between his knees, and lit the butt end of a cigarette which had been tucked behind his ear.

"You'll find out soon enough," he promised gloomily. "I was with the Disciplinary Battalion once for two years. It wasn't as bad as this. One of these days, Groote's going to wake up with a bayonet in his big gut. And he isn't the worst, by any means. There's plenty of others."

Karkovski pitched his pack upon his bed and turned to Barney.

"I thought you were going to nail that buzzard," he observed. "*I* wouldn't stand for that treatment from anybody, sergeant or no sergeant."

Barney was filling his tin mug at a water pail by the door.

"What's the hurry?" he inquired. "I ain't going to prison just to please Groote. I joined this outfit to keep out of prison, if anybody should ask you."

"Not I!" swore the Russian. "If he ordered me about like that I'd smash him in the face and go to prison!"

"Go to it," agreed Barney. "We ain't built the same way, I guess. I'm giving Groote all the breaks. But if he don't know when to quit, and if I have to fix his feet he's going to stay put for a long, long time—and nobody's going to be any the wiser. Get me?"

He spoke quietly, but the threat behind every word he uttered was so plain that Karkovski's eyes flew wide open.

"You mean—"

"Are you asking me?" drawled Barney. "Now forget it. All I want is peace and quiet. I'm not hunting trouble."

BUT he found neither peace nor quiet at Ain Fezzoul. Minutes later, as he was heading for the baths, Groote sent for him.

"Better see him first and wash afterward," advised the orderly. "You don't want to keep that hyena waiting."

"Let him wait and be damned to him," Waldeman protested. "We're off duty until two o'clock. We're entitled to a few hours' rest after marching all night, I should think."

Barney shook his head. "I'll be along later. Orders is orders."

Groote was lounging on the window sill in a small, whitewashed cubicle he referred to as his "private quarters." At his feet stood an empty wine bottle. In one hand he held a glass, in the other a short-stemmed clay pipe.

He came straight to the point, brutally, without any pretense whatsoever.

"Listen, you, I want two thousand francs and I want 'em now. How about it?"

"Well," drawled Barney, "come to think of it, I could use a couple of thousand myself. How about it? Got any suggestions to make—er—sergeant."

"I'm talking b u s i n e s s," retorted Groote, scowling ominously. "Don't tell me you have no money. I read about you in the papers. You're Walsh. I know all about you. We have an old score to settle, you and I. It's going to

cost you exactly two thousand, and you're going to hand it over here and now if you know what's good for you."

"My pay," said Barney, "is twenty-five centimes a day. Apart from that I haven't a nickel."

He spoke the literal truth. The last of his cash had gone the night of the riot at the Theatre du Globe. His wallet had been stolen and his pockets turned inside out.

"You're lying," threatened Groote.

"And if I had any dough," Barney went on, "I wouldn't give you one red cent if my life depended upon it. Don't kid yourself."

"I'd change my mind, if I were you," Groote warned him. "If you don't, you'll be on your way to the rock pile in double-quick time. We don't need notorious criminals in this company. One word from me to the adjutant and you're through. Casto's a fast worker. But I'll let you off easy. Hand over the two thousand and I'll see you aren't bothered. If you're reasonable—I have plenty of pull—I can find a good job for you."

Barney, no longer looking or acting like a Legionnaire, cut him short.

"Why, you cheap grafter, you couldn't blackmail me on a bet. Get wise to yourself. You double-crossed me once, and you got away with it, but you won't do it again if you know what's good for you. I'm telling you. Now look: I'm broke—stony—and I don't crave publicity. I'll do my stuff, Groote, I'll play ball with you, but if you get tough, if you try any more stunts like you did this morning, I'll have you up before the commanding officer, with plenty of witnesses and you'll get all that's coming your way if I know anything about the Legion."

Groote roared with laughter.

"You have a lot to learn about the Legion," he jeered. "You'll find out all about it before you're much older. The commanding officer? You can forget him. He's nothing but a stuffed shirt. I'm the boss of this platoon. Bear that in mind, and when you're ready to cough up that two thousand, look me up. Get out!"

He reached over and half drew his revolver from the holster hanging on the wall at the head of his bed.

"Get!" he repeated as Barney wavered, "or I'll blow your brains out."

Barney turned on his heels and left the room. At the depot everything he had seen had led him to believe that the Legion's law applied to all ranks without exception. And this system which seemed to be so free from the graft, corruption and crookedness he had known in civilian life had won his grudging respect, then his admiration.

Groote's threats did not shake his faith. He went about his business firmly convinced that so long as he stayed within the law, no harm could befall him. But he was wholly wrong. He was a marked man, powerless in the face of Groote's determination to smash him. He could not stay within the law. Without rhyme or reason, for imaginary specks of rust on his bayonet, for non-existent spots on his clothes, for offences he had not even thought of committing, he was shoved in solitary confinement, fined, starved, and drilled till he dropped—drilled in the full blast of the desert sun with a fifty pound sandbag balanced, for good measure, on the top of his knapsack.

Complaints were worse than useless. They never got beyond Adjutant Casto, who treated complaints as personal insults and doubled all sentences without even trying to find out what the troopers might have to say.

"You—of all people!" he rasped when Barney appeared before him. "A specimen of a gangster, you want to bring charges against one of my sergeants! You ought to be shot. You'll do ten days' punishment drill on half rations, you damned *salopard*. And I'll double the

sentence if ever you dare to come to me whining about bad treatment!"

His sentences were without appeal. Captain Riverain meant well, but he was absorbed by a hundred political and administrative problems. The town of Ain Fezzoul was under his direct control, and he had to keep in touch also with the nomadic tribes scattered throughout the several hundred square miles of his district. It was a full time job. In five years he had trebled the irrigated area of the oasis, organized a school of agriculture, and established a free dispensary. And while he labored to improve the natives' well being, his company of Legionnaires, entrusted to the tender mercies of Adjutant Casto, had gone to pieces. Outwardly it retained a semblance of cohesion and discipline, but the intangible force that had welded those one hundred and twenty-five hard-fisted, hard-headed troopers together; the spark that had kindled their blind faith in their regiment was dead and cold.

A sense of impending tragedy brooded over Ain Fezzoul. Casto and his noncommissioned officers could still exact obedience, but it was a sullen, grudging obedience exacted at the pistol point. They could no longer trust any of the men, not even those who fawned upon them and whispered secret information about mutinies and threatened reprisals.

No competent officer would have tolerated such a state of affairs, but Riverain had lost all contact with his men, and the sergeants, drunk with too much power, ruled by fear, growing more brutal and callous from day to day as they tried to stem the torrent of hatred they had let loose.

Barney was one of many. He had plenty of company in the guard-room and at defaulters' drill, but that did not help him to accept his fate philosophically. A more promising Legionnaire would have been hard to find than Barney the day he reached Ain Fezzoul, but in six short weeks every last scrap of loyalty had been battered out of him.

THE climax came one morning while, by way of punishment, he was toting stones off the trail leading up to the fort. He heard the clatter of horses' hoofs and, looking up, saw Lieutenant d'Auclaire riding toward him.

Barney did not hesitate. He dropped his load and placed himself directly in the lieutenant's path.

He came up to attention, saluted, and said in a clear voice:

"*Mon lieutenant*, may I speak to you, if you please? I have a complaint to make."

Unfortunately he had no legal right to appeal to d'Aclaire without the express permission of his sergeant.

And the lieutenant, when he saw that he was being addressed by the scoundrel who had caused so much trouble that memorable night at the Theatre du Globe, was filled with righteous wrath. His transfer to Ain Fezzoul, where he was suffering from the most exquisite boredom, was directly due to his altercation with Barney, and he resented the mere thought that such a notorious criminal should have the gall to address him in this unseemly fashion. Because his own conscience was none too clear he was positive that Barney had a grudge against him and was about to resort to physical violence.

"Stand back!" he ordered.

"But, *mon lieutenant*—" began Barney.

D'Aclaire shouted at Groote who was lumbering down the trail as fast as he could run.

"Can't you control your men, sergeant? Confound it! Must I be pestered by every soldier who thinks he has a complaint to make?"

This was a slight exaggeration for he had not done a stroke of work since he had been at Ain Fezzoul.

"Very sorry, *mon lieutenant,*" panted Groote. "This man is incorrigible. Worst offender I've ever had to handle. Can't do a thing with him."

"I have been trying to place a complaint before Captain Riverain for the past nine weeks," Barney persisted doggedly, "but Adjutant Casto will not allow me to do so, and—"

The mere mention of Riverain's name was enough to set d'Auclaire's teeth on edge. There was no love lost between the district commandant and his subaltern. Riverain who had the soul of a bureaucrat, could not abide d'Auclaire's lack of interest in paper work, and instead of making use of him to run the company had treated him as though he were incompetent and useless.

The lieutenant vented his resentment upon Barney, lashing him with his tongue.

"Then your complaint must be groundless. Sergeant, see to it that this man does ten days' detention. If such a thing should happen again I shall hold you responsible."

He gathered up his reins and sent his horse forward at a fast trot without deigning to glance in Barney's direction.

"Ruin my reputation, would you?" commented Groote. "Wait until I get you in a cell. I'm going to give you something to complain about, you lousy gangster."

"He said detention—not cells," Barney pointed out quietly.

"But a cell is the place you're headed for," barked Groote. "Leave it to the adjutant."

Barney gave his shoulders a slight shrug.

"That's fine, sergeant Go right ahead, but this is the last time you frame me. I've had a skinful."

"What's that—a threat?" shouted Groote, gripping the butt end of his revolver.

Barney smiled at him.

"I'm making no threats. I'm telling you, that's all."

Groote drew his revolver and leveled it at Barney's chest.

"I'll wipe that smile off your mug before you're much older Step out if you don't want to croak. They wouldn't even hold a court of inquiry for a blackguard like you."

And Barney trudged uphill to the fort, and across the courtyard to the cell block. Once he was safely stowed away where no witnesses could observe their actions, Groote and the orderly sergeant used him as a punching bag, slugging him with their gun barrels and their fists. When he fell they rolled him over, and the orderly sergeant sat on him, while Groote ripped his clothes off.

"I thought he had a money belt," Groote commented angrily. "He was supposed to have thousands stowed away somewhere. Leave it to the newspapers to lie and invent all kinds of fool rumors."

The other non-com picked up the lantern and held it so that its light fell on Barney's swollen face.

"My old one," he said at last, "I've been in the Legion almost eight years, and I'm not what you might call soft. Some of these *salopards* need a good hiding every so often just to keep 'em toned down—but if I were you I'd be careful."

"I'm not worrying about such vermin."

"I would," the non-com went on. "You don't find many like him He didn't let out a whimper. That breed's dangerous."

Groote drove the toe of his boot against Barney's jaw.

"Just let him start something," he jeered. "Prison's the place for him, and that's where he's going if I have anything to do with it."

But he was very careful not to take his eyes off Barney as he stepped backward out of the cell.

IT WAS late afternoon; it was suffocatingly hot. A gusty wind tore at the Venetian blinds and filled the air with dust, thick as a yellow mist.

There was a film of grit underfoot, on the desk, in Captain Riverain's hair. Where his neck bulged over his collar the skin was raw and fiery red.

But he was unaware of his physical discomfort as he stamped about the office, muttering beneath his breath and scowling at the pattern on the carpet.

Each time he passed in front of Adjutant Casto, who stood awkwardly jammed up against a chair, Riverain exclaimed:

"Disgraceful! Simply disgraceful! I am astounded! I am shocked! You hear me, Casto. I am shocked and amazed!"

He had every reason to be. That day he had been brought face to face with the brutal truth that the XIVth Company was completely demoralized.

There had been a full dress parade for the benefit of a number of *kaids* of doubtful loyalty, who were to have been over-awed by the martial valor of the local garrison. And the XIVth Company, in the presence of the *kaids*, of the battalion commander and his staff, of the officer in charge of native affairs, and other important personages—the XIVth Company had behaved shamefully. Platoons had tied themselves up in knots; the simplest orders had thrown the ranks into confusion; no two squads could be made to observe the same spacing and alignment. As a *grande finale*, during the march past the reviewing stand, one man had gone mad, and had only been subdued after a ghastly scuffle which had brought smiles to the lips of the *kaids*.

Sick with apprehension Riverain had watched his guests pile into their staff cars and roar away toward the base. The battalion commander before his departure had had a private interview with Riverain, and the latter had emerged from that meeting white and shaken as only a man can be who has suddenly been confronted by the dreadful certainty of his own downfall. He might be able to build up the morale of his men, he might be allowed to hold on to his present job, but his prospects of promotion and better billets had been shattered.

"Have you no explanation to offer?" he flung at Casto. "Sacred name of a thousand thunders, do you have to stand there gaping like a carp? Didn't you know what was going on?"

"I have had trouble ever since the reinforcement draft arrived," Casto admitted, "but I never imagined—"

"You never imagined!" Riverain said scathingly. "You aren't paid to have imagination. You're supposed to be responsible for the discipline and morale of the men, and that is all."

Casto had done his best, according to his standards, to maintain discipline. But he had been given too much power, and power had gone to his head. Even then it did not occur to him that the Legionnaires might be in open rebellion against his brutal tyranny. His conscience was clear.

"I am very sorry, *mon capitaine*," he retorted, "but everything was all right until that last batch of recruits joined us. Some of them are dangerous criminals. I can't do a thing with them. They have poisoned other men's minds. They're clever I can't pin a thing on them. They're not soldiers; they're agitators."

"But this is terrible!" cried Riverain. "It's a conspiracy. Why didn't you warn me. D'you know who the ring-leaders are?"

Casto had their names on the tip of his tongue: Waldeman and Karkovski and, worst of all, an American, a notorious gangster called Barney; but that wasn't his real name. It was Walsh.

"Walsh!" repeated the captain. "I read about him in the papers some months ago. Good God!"

"That's the man. He is an evil influence, if I may say so."

"What has he done since he has been here?"

"Er—well—that's just it. He's too crafty to let me catch him, but he has been stirring up discontent. . . ."

Riverain ran his fingers through his thinning hair.

"All right," he snapped. "Tomorrow I'll hold a court of inquiry. And the culprits, Casto, whoever they may be are going to prison. Meanwhile, I am going home. I am worn out and I have a headache of the most abominable!"

But he was due for an even worse headache before he reached the residency. As he was about to leave the office an orderly brought him a note from the medical officer in charge of the infirmary.

> Can you come over at once? A native, Mulay abd el Barka, has just been brought in. Says he must see you. He has not long to live. Gunshot wounds in abdomen and groin. Right hip smashed. Hurry if you want to talk with him.

Riverain hurried, galloping at top speed through the dust, for Mulay abd el Barka was one of the very few secret agents he had ever been able to depend upon to keep him informed as to the movements of the unconquered tribes inhabiting the broken country along the northern boundaries of the district.

Under ordinary circumstances the news that Mulay lay dying would have caused Riverain a great deal of distress, but coming on top of all the other disastrous incidents of the day, it assumed in his mind's eye the proportions of a major calamity.

He found Mulay stretched out, thin and bloodless, beneath a tightly drawn sheet. His eyes lit up when Riverain entered the room, but he was too weak to move.

The captain had to bend down close to his lips to catch the whispered words.

After months of patient work Mulay had found out how the dissident tribes were supplied with arms and ammunition. Gun smugglers, coming from Rio de Ouro, eluded the French patrols by cutting across the desert in the western corner of the Ain Fezzoul district.

"But there are no wells," protested Riverain, who had always maintained that no gun runner could set foot in his territory without being captured and shot.

"*Sidi,*" whispered Mulay, "thou art wrong. The wells exist. Two of them. I went over the road with the last convoy. The old caravan trail from Marakech to Adraar—"

"Those wells were choked with sand. The survey engineers said—"

"The wells have been reopened. Ras-el-Baroud to south, Bou-Sefta to the northeast. Those I saw. There I drank clear water, *sidi,* cool water." A pink foam was gathering in the corners of his mouth, bubbling over his jet-black beard. His voice gurgled in his throat. "Another convoy goes through in a week or so. It will reach Ras-el-Baroud in five days. Post men at Bou-Sefta, *sidi,* take the *harka* by surprise, drive it back toward Ras-el-Baroud, then close in behind it, catch it between two fires. It will perish for lack of water. Five hundred rifles, *sidi.*"

His eyes opened enormously wide, and his long fingers closed convulsively on Riverain's wrist.

"Five hundred rifles!" he repeated, raising his head off the pillow. "Keep away from Ras-el-Baroud. You can not get there in time—not now—they—"

He choked and through the pink foam a thread of dark blood ran down his cheek, staining the pillow. He tried to speak again, but his words were unintelligible. His breathing grew more and more labored until at last it stopped altogether, and his eyes stared unwinkingly at the ceiling.

Tears dribbled off the end of Riverain's nose onto the sheet.

"Stupid of me," he apologized, heaving himself to his feet. "I've had a hard day."

"You can't do anything about it now. Go home and rest," advised the doctor. "A cup of hot tea will do you more good than anything else. Madame Riverain will take care of that, I am sure."

Riverain, however, had not yet reached the end of his calvary. Worse, far worse, lay in store for him when he reached the residency.

ON THE settee, in the drawing room where he had been bawled out earlier in the day by his battalion commander, he was priviliged to behold his wife, Madeleine, with her arms clasped around the neck of Lieutenant d'Auclaire, resting her head on his shoulder.

Riverain's blood promptly boiled as only a Frenchman's blood can boil when confronted by such a spectacle. Finding his wife draped around any man's neck would have been a terrible blow to his self-esteem and his pride of possession, but that the man should happen to be d'Auclaire destroyed Riverain's last remnant of faith in human nature. For the lieutenant was the bugbear of his existence, and a thorn in his side.

He had done his best to make use of this superior young man, but their temperaments were too greatly opposed. Between them no team work was possible, and though they were still on speaking terms, Riverain, for weeks, had been striving to create a situation which would enable him to explode. He had relieved d'Auclaire of all responsibility and treated him as though he were a visitor at the fort, and an unwelcome visitor at that. But the lieutenant refused to allow himself to be maneuvered into a false position. He never disagreed with his commanding officer, never argued, never raised a single protest.

That morning, after the disastrous dress parade, he alone had kept his head, and had contrived to talk to the battalion commander as though everything were serenly normal. The colonel had shaken hands with him before he left, whereas he had favored Riverain with a stiff salute, more damaging than a kick in the seat of the pants. That handshake had been on Riverain's mind all day.

And now, worst and most outrageous of all insults, he had to find his wife weeping on the lieutenant's shoulder!

He did not stop to realize that d'Auclaire was perched on the edge of the settee in a stiff and awkward attitude. He let out a mighty howl and tried to leap across the room in one bounding stride. His muscles, however, were not equal to the task. Instead of landing on d'Auclaire's lap, he came to earth on a hand-woven prayer rug, skidded across the polished floor, rolled over several times and brought up with a crash against a Louis XV whatnot, which overturned and showered him with china Sevres coffee cups, and framed pictures of Mme. Riverain's two married sisters. The sharp-angled corner of one of the silver picture frames struck his head with so much force that it subdued his caveman instincts and cut a two-inch gash over his right eye.

He did not pass out, but he was so badly shaken that before he could extricate his feet from the glass door of the whatnot, his wife dropped on her knees at his side and tried to dab the blood out of his eyes with a handkerchief already damp with her tears.

D'Auclaire hovered in the background, looking like a cat who has just swallowed the pet canary.

"My poor Gustave!" cried the lady. "Now please—be calm—I am so sorry for you. You are hurt!"

Was he hurt! He was in agony!

"How dare you, *madame!*" he sputtered. "Do not speak to me. My honor—"

"Is intact, *mon capitaine,*" d'Auclaire said blandly. "I had the pleasure of taking tea with *madame* this afternoon. She was very much upset by the incidents which occurred this morning. All her thoughts were of you."

They were so high minded and so virtuous that they made Riverain feel like a cad, and left him without a leg to stand on although he remained morally convinced that he had been grievously wronged.

And while they talked queer thoughts began to gather at the back of Riverain's mind. At first he rejected them, but they came back again and again with more force, and more precision, until at last a definite plan took shape almost against his will. He could rid himself, at one stroke, of all the malignant forces that threatened to wreck his life.

"I'm afraid I was too hasty," he admitted after his wife had washed the gore off his face and applied a strip of adhesive tape over the cut. "I suggest that we forget all about it. This has been a hard day for me. I'm not at all well."

"Everything is going to come out all right," soothed his wife. "Of course you are upset, *mon cheri.* Lieutenant d'Auclaire understands so well how you feel."

It was almost dark. A solemn-faced orderly, sweating curiosity at every pore, brought in a lighted kerosene lamp, placed it on the table, and departed, carefully closing the door behind him.

"With your permission," smiled d'Auclaire, "I shall be on my way. It must be very late."

"Wait," said Riverain. "There is a matter of some importance I want to talk over with you, lieutenant. I should have had to send for you after dinner anyway, so if you'll come over to the office with me I'll go into details at once."

"Why not talk here?" said his wife, trying to be very bright and gay. "Wouldn't you like an aperitif?"

"An excellent idea," he agreed, "if d'Auclaire will join us.

"Charmed!" bowed the lieutenant.

And so, over lukewarm vermouth, while the wind tore at the palm trees outside the house, Riverain sentenced d'Auclaire to death.

"One of our secret agents came in this afternoon with a wild story about an old well having been reopened by gun smugglers at Ras-el-Baroud. Personally I don't believe a word of it. (Have a little more vermouth, d'Auclaire?) Not a single word. But I am sending out a small patrol in the morning to investigate and report, and I think it might be a good plan if you went along You need experience, you know."

"Quite," agreed d'Auclaire. "It ought to be very interesting."

Riverain nodded. "It will give you a taste of campaign conditions, but you won't find it very exciting. Ras-el-Baroud has been abandoned for years—long before our time. And if there are any gun smugglers anywhere in the neighborhood they'll give you a wide, wide berth. They're not going to run the risk of losing their stock in trade! I wouldn't ask you to go if Ras-el-Baroud were not so far away. I can't entrust a two hundred kilometer patrol to a sergeant."

"At your service," said d'Auclaire, and Madame Riverain, seeing them on such amicable terms, breathed a sigh of relief.

She might not have been so relieved, however, had she been present at four o'clock the following morning when d'Auclaire led his party out of the fort and headed westward across the plain.

Eighteen men marched behind him; eighteen hand-picked troopers, the ringleaders who, according to Casto, had undermined the company's morale. Sullen and defiant, they slogged along in the lieutenant's wake, and a more unpromising, potentially dangerous crew would have been hard to find anywhere on the face of God's green earth.

Barney was there, and Karkovski, and Waldeman, and all the other stubborn, intractable Legionnaires who had refused to cringe before the adjutant. And

in rear, behind the three pack-mules, Sergeant Groote closed the line of march.

STRUNG out in single file the patrol straggled up the flank of the sand-drift. White-hot, the sunlight lay like molten metal upon the Legionnaires' head and shoulders. Bowed down beneath the weight of their packs, step by labored step they fought their way up the slope, which gave way beneath their feet and held them back so that they seemed to be marking time on a treadwheel.

Karkovski was first to reach the crest. On hands and knees, craning his neck, he stared at the country beyond, and all at once a hoarse shout burst from his lips:

"Water!"

Dead ahead, not half a mile away, in the middle of the shimmering inferno, stood a clump of trees, amazingly green and cool, and the broken, crumbling dome of a whitewashed house.

Barney crawled up beside the Russian and lay on top of the ridge, wheezing as he sucked the superheated air into his lungs.

"It's a mirage—"he began.

"It is not," protested Karkovski. "It is too close." Tears filled his red-rimmed eyes. "I can smell the water!"

"Well, what the heck, that ain't nothing to cry about," Barney retorted. "It beats me where you get enough water for all them tears."

"It is not sadness, it is joy," exclaimed Karkovski. "That is my nature. In Russia—"

Barney glanced over his shoulder. The rest of the patrol was scarcely midway up the slope. The lieutenant, on foot, pulling at his horse's bridle, was hurrying forward, slipping and sliding at every step.

"Russia!" grunted Barney. "You ain't got nothing to cheer about yet. We got a long way to go yet."

"You still think we can do it?"

Barney nodded emphatically. "Sure—why not? We're about two hundred and fifty kilometers from Rio de something or other. After that nobody can touch us. Call it another hundred and fifty to the Atlantic coast. That ain't so much."

"Four hundred kilometers of this!" muttered Karkovski, jerking his beard in the direction of the sand dunes. "It is a great craziness. We have no compass—no map. We do not know where the wells are."

"All we got to do is to keep on going due west," said Barney. "Three pack mules'll carry enough water to see us through. There's enough food and plenty of ammunition."

"It's a long way—"

"And what of it? That ain't news. We've chewed it over a hundred time. Don't you want to get out of this outfit?"

"But I do not want to commit suicide. And even if we get through—even if we reach Spanish territory—what comes afterward? We have no money."

Barney refused to bother about such minor details. He could not afford to. The future would have to take care of itself.

"If you got cold feet," he said angrily, "You can stay behind with the looie and Groote. They're going to need company in the worst way. They're due for a good long rest when we pull out."

Before Karkovski could frame a suitable retort d'Auclaire scrambled up beside them and examined the oasis through his binoculars. There was not a living soul in sight. From the spot where he stood to the clump of trees lay a stretch of stone-littered plain. A crescent-shaped sand-dune along the southern edge of the oasis had engulfed some of the trees. Several were buried so deep that only their ragged green fronds stuck out above the sand.

D'Auclaire lowered his glasses.

"All right," he announced. "Karkovski,

you are on point duty. Go ahead and keep your eyes open. Don't go too fast."

Karkovski hitched up his pack and swung down the slope, digging his heels into the soft sand at each stride. He didn't bother to acknowledge the order, nor to salute, nor did d'Auclaire attempt to rebuke him. Discipline had worn so thin since the patrol had left Ain Fezzoul that it had almost ceased to exist.

There had been no definite break but d'Auclaire had learned to his bitter dismay that his authority over the Legionnaires was non-existent. They were not at all impressed by his immense superiority. They were'nt even aware of it!

Thrown in close contact with the rank and file as never before on that long trek across the desert he had come to realize that these rough, mannerless troopers possessed unsuspected qualities of good humor, dogged courage and self-reliance. And the scales had dropped from his eyes. Leadership, he had discovered, was not a God given privilege, a matter of birth and breeding. Leadership called for a knowledge of human nature he did not possess, for understanding he had never tried to acquire, for sympathy without condescension, for unswerving loyalty not only on the part of the led but of the leader.

His own shortcomings had become so glaring that he had lost all faith in himself. He would have given all he owned to win the respect of his troopers—but he did not know how to go about it. One thing, however, he had had sense enough to do: he had kept his temper, and gone about his business as placidly as possible, ignoring all provocations, asking no support of Sergeant Groote, for the latter, from the moment he had marched out of the fort, had been suffering from nervous apprehension which unfitted him to be of any assistance whatsoever.

As soon as Karkovski had covered about fifty yards d'Auclaire turned to Barney.

"You're at cover-point," he said in an even voice. "Follow Karkovski. Stop when you reach the trees and wait for the patrol to come up."

Barney paused just long enough to show clearly what he thought of the lieutenant's orders, then he heaved himself to his feet and slid downhill in Karkovski's footsteps. He felt almost lighthearted. In a very little while he was going to tell d'Auclaire and Groote where they got off, and if they didn't like it it would be just too bad.

He was midway across the plain when, out of the tail end of his eyes, he thought he saw something flash along the rim of the sand-drift south of the oasis.

"See anything?" he called to Karkovski, and his voice sounded queerly flat in the noontide silence.

Karkovski half turned, shielding his eyes with the palm of his hand as he peered at the trees half buried in the sand.

"Thought I did," he shouted. "Nothing there now. . ."

He went on, and Barney followed him keeping a wary eye turned toward the rim of the dune. There was nothing to be seen, the day was so still that he could hear the muffled beat of his heart throbbing in his ears, but an indefinable change had occurred. His grip on his rifle grew tighter; he moved forward as gingerly as though he were treading on eggs. Glancing uneasily over his shoulder he was relieved to see that the patrol was coming down the slope in a long, straggling line.

But as he looked toward his front again, once more he spied a quick, slithering flash over yonder on the skyline. And all at once the air seemed to quiver. Little tongues of flame, colorless in the sunlight, played along the crest of the sand dune by the oasis. There was a burst of sound, a splintering crash, followed instantly by the shrill whine of bullets. They came with a swift rush, thudding into the dust at his feet, whis-

tling past his head so close that they fanned his cheeks.

ROOTED to the earth, rigid, numbed by the noise, he saw Karkovski turn and come running toward him. Karkovski's mouth was wide open. He was shouting, but his words were blown away. The shadows beneath the trees were alive now with blazing rifles. Before Barney could tear his feet off the ground, Karkovski lurched drunkenly and clapped both hands to his neck. His legs buckled beneath him. He fell to his knees. Another slug crashed into his head. His cap whirled away. He pitched forward onto his face, spilling his brains into the sand through a jagged hole at the base of his skull.

Then Barney moved. He forgot heat, thirst and exhaustion. Fleet footed as a gazelle he raced toward the shelter of the sand hill. The patrol had gone to earth. He was out in the open, alone, a target for every sniper in the oasis.

He still had twenty yards to go when he was struck a tremendous blow in the small of the back. An invisible hand seemed to pick him up and hurl him to the ground. A sleet of lead beat about him. He tried to get up, but his legs would not budge.

"That's the doctor," he thought. "Spine's bust, I guess."

He dug his elbows into the sand in a vain effort to lever himself along, but the weight of his knapsack nailed him down and he could make no headway.

Suddenly a pair of boots came within his range of vision. He looked up. Lieutenant d'Auclaire, seemingly very phlegmatic and bored, bent over him. For all his apparent boredom, however, the lieutenant wasted no time. He rolled Barney over, caught him beneath the armpits and dragged him up the slope. He made slow progress but at last he reached the crest and dumped Barney out of reach of the bullets.

"We'll try to patch you up before we move forward," he said when he recovered his breath. "Where were you hit?"

"Spine," croaked Barney. "You can't do a thing for me."

The lieutenant, he was forced to admit, was a cool customer even though he was a lousy squirt. It called for steady nerves to walk out into that burst of fire.

"I'm much obliged," he went on grudgingly, and because he thought he was dying he added, "What the hell made you do it? What's one gangster more or less to you?"

D'Auclaire, raising one eyebrow, drawled:

"I know nothing about gangsters. You happen to be one of *my* Legionnaires. That's a good and sufficient reason, isn't it? Now let me see that wound. We'll have to hurry—"

"Forget it," urged Barney. "I'm all washed up."

But a moment later he was alarmed, and infinitely relieved, to discover that he could wiggle his toes, and as two Legionnaires turned him over onto his stomach, he discovered further that he could use his legs.

D'Auclaire felt his back, tugged at his belt, and held up his entrenching tool. The shaft was split in two and the metal ring was flattened out.

"Your spine," the lieutenant announced, "appears to be all right. I think you will recover from the effects of the—er—bruise. But you'll need a new entrenching tool, I'm afraid."

A gust of laughter—the first in weeks—came from the troopers. Barney turned scarlet.

"I couldn't move—"he started to say.

D'Auclaire cut him short, dismissing the incident with a jerky nod.

"Fall in," he ordered. "On two ranks, facing me."

The uproar had died away and his clear, unemotional voice rang in the stillness. He was so unperturbed and cool

that the Legionnaires obeyed his commands as they had never done before.

"We shall have to drive those people out," he said briskly. "We must do so at once before they have a chance to foul the well. Most of us, I gather, would enjoy a drink."

Without faltering, or groping for words, he explained clearly what he intended to do. He was going to attack the enemy with twelve men. Sergeant Groote and the six other troopers were to stay where they were and pump lead into the oasis until the attacking party reached the trees. Afterward Groote was to rush his party forward and help mop up the rebels.

"Most of us," d'Auclaire concluded, "are going into action for the first time. I expect you—every one of you—to obey orders without question. Sergeant, you will have charge of the machine gun. Open fire as soon as we start. Smother 'em. Barney, look after the pack mules. You're in no fit state to move about yet."

"My legs—" began Barney.

"You have your orders," snapped d'Auclaire. "They are final." He confronted the twelve men who were to follow him. "Off packs. Fix bayonets! Forward!"

In half a minute the detachment was on its way. A gust of fire greeted the men as they crossed the sky line. Strays shrieked by overhead, others kicked up flurries of dust along the top of the dune.

Groote sang out:

"Range, three hundred meters! Target, the trees in front of the attacking party! Independent rapid fire! Fire!"

The Legionnaires let drive round after round as fast as they could load and aim. Crouching low, his shoulders hunched around his ears, Groote blazed away with the light machine-gun; one short burst, another, then the bullets came in a steamy stream.

Smack! A trooper slewed around, his lower jaw shot away, and rolled downhill. He came to rest a foot or so from Barney.

One glimpse of that shapeless, red horror that had been a man's face was enough for him. He fastened the bridles of the pack animals and of d'Auclaire's horse together in one tight knot, made them fast to the dead Legionnaire's belt, and crawled up to the ridge.

The assaulting party had gone to earth. The men lay behind a low hummock within a stone's throw of the trees. In their wake five gray shapes sprawled motionless in the dust.

One man, close to Barney, shouted:

"It's a massacre! They'll wipe us out!"

He was half hysterical with heat and noise and fear.

"Yep," nodded Barney. "If you have anything to do with it we'll be wiped out sure enough."

His back felt so much better that he was scarcely aware of any pain as he crept along till he lay beside Groote. The sergeant, his eyes starting from his head, yelled:

"Fire! Fire, you fool! Can't you see what's happening?"

"Fire at what?" snorted Barney, ducking as a covey of bullets swept the ridge. "Them slugs ain't coming from the oasis, you mutt. Watch for the flashes. All the firing's coming from that sand heap over on the left."

But Groote was not listening. With feverish haste, his fingers shaking, he slapped a fresh cartridge drum onto the machine-gun and was about to squeeze the trigger, when Barney said:

"Here, gimme that. You ain't fit to handle a popgun, let alone that doggone typewriter. Let me have it."

Purple with rage, the tendons standing out in cords on his thick neck, Groote swung around, jamming the hot gun muzzle into Barney's stomach.

"I'll blow you to pieces!" he bellowed. "I told you to open fire. . . ."

Barney was in no mood for an argu-

ment. His left hand swept down, knocking the muzzle aside. His right crashed against Groote's jaw. The sergeant lurched unsteadily, and Barney slugged him again, flattening him out. It happened so swiftly that the other Legionnaires were not sure whether Groote had been shot or punched. But Barney held the machine-gun.

"Get that gun going," bellowed Waldeman. "For God's sake hurry!"

"I'm hurrying," assented Barney. "Now look; you fellows keep on peppering that sand heap and, for the love of Mike, aim straight. Scatter your shots; keep those birds guessing. And if Groote butts in rock him to sleep."

"How about that machine-gun?" insisted Waldeman. "What—"

"Leave it to me. If we can't get in to that damned oasis the front way we'll try the back door. I'll be seeing you."

WITH the machine-gun in his arms he raced down the slope and swung around in a wide circle, working in behind the ridge of sand south of the oasis. Sometimes he ran, sometimes he squirmed along flat on his belly, and at last he found himself staring at the reverse slope of the sand drift.

Some horses were tethered down below. A native squatted on his hams close beside them. A rifle lay across his knees. Up above, on the sky line, thirty-odd men, clad in the grey *djellabas* of the Moroccan tribes, kept up a steady fire.

A thin smile drew down the corners of Barney's mouth. It was as easy as falling off a log. Inch by inch he crept in closer, hugging the earth until he reached a position where he could enfilade the line of snipers. With infinite caution he adjusted the sights and brought the gun to bear on the man guarding the horses.

Crack! The bullets came with a rush. The native leaped to his feet, then caved in as though he had been cut in two. Six hundred to the minute the bullets sped on their way. A horse reared up, pawed the air, and came down on top of the native. Another rolled over, and another. In utter confusion, the others wheeled and stampeded in a great whirl of dust.

Barney swung the gun toward the snipers. Bunched together, some kneeling, some standing, they were pointing at him, gesticulating wildly. A slug grazed his left wrist. Then he let them have it in one unbroken burst of fire which crept up toward their feet, climbed higher, and moved them down as though a giant scythe had swept their ranks.

A handful bolted. Methodically Barney picked them off, one here, one there, bowling them over like rabbits, until the survivors dodged behind the palm fronds and passed out of sight.

For a long while he lay still, waiting for some sign of a counter-thrust, but none came, not a shot was fired in his direction. A great deal of noise came from the oasis, and after a time he saw a large group of natives running across the plain toward the pillar of dust that hung above the bolting horses. One last burst of rifle fire sped them on their way and as it died down the faint sound of cheering reached Barney's ears.

He stood up stiffly—his back was very sore again—and limped toward the oasis. The machine-gun weighed a ton. At first he met no one, but as he approached the trees d'Auclaire came toward him.

His first words were:

"I thought I told you to take charge of the pack animals?"

The question took all the wind out of Barney's sails. D'Auclaire, he perceived, had a great deal more backbone than might have been expected. There was a steely glint in his eyes very different from his usual superior and sleepy stare. He looked hot and out of breath and much more purposeful that he had ever looked before.

"I forgot all about the mules," Barney confessed.

"I don't advice you to make a practice of forgetting orders," snapped d'Auclaire, "But," he added, "there are exception to most rules. You saved the detachment from annihilation, and I thank you for what you did. I am very sorry I misjudged you."

Barney closed up like a clam.

"Aw, that's all right," he muttered. "We all make mistakes, I guess—"

He did not want to rehash their misunderstandings. What he wanted just then was a drink, but he very much feared that the lieutenant might be about to become effusive and kiss him on both cheeks or do something equally absurd. He was quickly undeceived. D'Auclaire had his emotions well under control.

"You are quite right," he admitted. "But there's one mistake I wouldn't make again if I were you. When you happen to disagree with your platoon sergeant don't make a practice of knocking his teeth down his throat."

"He was bughouse," swore Barney. "He was shooting—"

"I want no details," d'Auclaire broke in. "When we get black to Ain Fezzoul we are starting out—all of us—with a clean slate. It's up to you to keep it clean if you want to."

But they were a long, long way from Ain Fezzoul, farther indeed than any of them realized at that moment.

WALDEMAN loosened the buckles holding the pack on Karkovski's back.

"He's out of the Legion," he said gloomily. "He's lucky. What are we going to do? Still think we can reach the coast?"

Barney swung the dead man's kit onto his own shoulders before he spoke.

"We're pretty well clawed to pieces. Strikes me we'll have to hang together a while longer. We couldn't leave the looie behind to be carved up by them wild gazebos."

"We'll have to go back to the fort."

"Got any better suggestion to make?" Barney demanded angrily. "There's nine of us left, and two wounded. What are you going to do with 'em? Leave 'em here to croak?"

"You can talk some other time!" shouted Groote, lumbering toward them. "Come on, get that stiff in his grave."

It was late afternoon. D'Auclaire had given the Legionnaires a few hours' rest and had sent them out to pick up the dead and bury them in one long pit on the outskirts of the oasis.

Fifty boxes of ammunition and over four hundred rifles, wrapped in burlap, ready for loading, had been found by the well. It was a tremendous haul, but the gun runners had made no attempt to drive out the Legionnaires and regain possession of their booty.

Groote had been placed in charge of the burial party, and Groote now that the immediate danger was past was in an evil mood. He had tried to lodge a formal complaint against Barney, but the lieutenant had not given him a chance to state his case. Without cracking a smile d'Auclaire had congratulated the sergeant and assured him that he had displayed remarkable initative and forethought.

"A splendid move," he had declared. "If you hadn't sent Legionnaire Barney around the flank we should have been cut to pieces."

And Groote had been compelled to swallow his rage while the Legionnaires grinned sardonically.

His temper had not improved when d'Auclaire had sent him out to supervise the stretcher bearers. Beneath the trees he felt moderately safe, whereas out in the open, on the white-hot plain, a thousand eyes seemed to be peering at him. His one ambition was to finish the job and get back to the well in double-quick time.

"You can loaf later on," he bawled. "Pick him up instead of making a funeral oration. That *salopard* got what was coming to him."

Barney and Waldeman had already carried the bodies of four of their comrades to the communal grave. They were not overburdened with sentiment, either of them, but the task of burying men they had known so well, men with whom they had cursed and laughed, suffered and got magnificently pickled, was making them sick at their stomachs: the soft-nosed bullets manufactured by some up-and-coming armament firms for their expert trade make shocking wounds.

"Karkovski's dead," retorted Waldeman, his round face twitching with fury. "You needn't insult him now. He was worth ten of you."

"That'll do," shouted Groote. "You can't talk to me like that. The lieutenant may be afraid of you—I'm not! I said he was a blackguard and that's just what I mean. I got no more respect for that damn Russian than I have for a hyena. Do you think I don't know what's going on? He was going to desert. Yes, and so were you. But you won't! Not now, by God, and when I get back to Ain Fezzoul. . . ."

"So you're going back, are you?" said Barney, twisting his mouth sideways as he spoke. "That's fine!"

"I'll be there," rasped Groote, "and I can promise you right now you'll go to prison, you rat-faced criminal—where you ought to have been sent long ago. Come on, I tell you, pick up that baboon's carcass."

They were at his mercy. Their rifles were slung across their backs. He held his against his hip, ready to shoot, aching to shoot.

Waldeman said slowly: "It's easy to insult the dead, sergeant. But one of these days you may be dead too."

Groote had reached the end of his tether. His fingers closed convulsively on the trigger. Flame spurted from the gun muzzle full in Waldeman's face. Shot between the eyes he crumpled up on top of Karkovski.

It happened so swiftly that Barney had no opportunity to intervene. His hand closed on the hilt of his bayonet as he stumbled toward Groote who, now that his access of rage had spent itself, was staring in horrified amazement at his victim.

Before Barney could whip the bayonet from its scabbard, before he had taken two steps another shot rang out. A bullet whisked past him, and Groote, drilled through the heart went down all of one piece with that frightened, whimpering look fixed on his face for all eternity.

Barney spun around. A whisp of smoke hung above a boulder not a hundred yards away. As he watched it dissolve, a native rose up, head and shoulders above the rock, and took careful aim at him. He waited for no more. Dodging like a hare with a greyhound on its trail he sprinted toward the trees as fast as he could travel.

The gun runners had come back. Recovering from their blind panic when they had found that the surprise attack on their flank did not herald the approach of overwhelming forces, they had closed in upon the oasis where a handful of soldiers had taken possession of a store of rifles and ammunition worth a king's ransom.

They were not free agents, those simple Moroccan tribesmen. They were middlemen and traders, carrying munitions to Tafilalet rebels as they would have carried sugar or kerosene had the profits been as great. They could not afford to retreat while they stood a chance to recover their consignment.

But they were in no hurry. They had water in the goatskin bags lashed to their camels' flanks, they had food, and above all else they valued their hides far too much to rush recklessly across the open as hillbred warriors would have done.

They could afford to wait—to lie under cover and pick off the soldiers, and harrass them by day and by night until their endurance gave out, and they could be polished off without undue bloodshed among their assailants.

SPRAWLING behind a fallen tree-trunk Barney watched them close in. The light of the moon brushed their bare, brown bodies as they crawled through the dust. They made no sound. In the distance, against the black sky, the sand drifts were as bright as silver.

With stiff, slow movements Barney brought the muzzle of the machine-gun to bear upon the natives. He was so weary he could scarcely keep his eyes open. For the past forty-eight hours he had known neither sleep nor rest while the detachment dwindled to the size of a corporal's squad as man after man was snuffed out by the snipers' bullets. Now there was neither squad nor detachment. Barney lived, and d'Auclaire, and a blue-eyed Scandinavian giant by the name of Norberg, who could still crawl about and make use of a rifle though he had two bullets in his stomach and a third in his left thigh.

"Better hurry," Barney called out. "They're coming!"

Time and again the natives, eager to be done with this handful of *roumis,* had tried to rush the oasis; each time they had been driven off after hand to hand scuffles which had made a charnel house of Ras el Baroud. But three exhausted men could not protect themselves front, flank and rear. It was only a question of hours or minutes before a surprise attack swept them into oblivion.

Behind him, Barney could hear d'Auclaire and Norberg heaping the captured rifles and boxes of cartridges on a great bed of dry palm fronds and tree trunks. The lieutenant had delayed setting the pyre alight until the last second, hoping against hope that their assailants might be compelled to raise the seige for want of water. But the natives had not withdrawn; the end was in sight.

"Many coming?" shouted d'Auclaire.

"Plenty. More than I can hold."

After a brief pause d'Auclaire said:

"Very well—"

A match sputtered and as the dry leaves caught fire a great lick of flame shot skyward.

And then pandemonium broke loose. The natives, pouring volley after volley in among the trees, closed in with a rush, yelling as they came. Barney let them have it. His hands were numb and the gun jerked unsteadily, but after the first few rounds, he brought it to bear upon the close-packed mob. It wavered as the stream of lead struck home and opened out fanwise He blew the center to pieces, dropping a dozen men. The others swerved away and scattered, but for once they did not retreat. Taking cover behind the dead, they returned Barney's fire, using the flash of his gun as a target.

Slugs beat about him, drumming into the trees, plowing up the earth. A sharp stab of pain shot through his left shoulder, and as he rolled over another bullet cut a groove across his cheek-bone, covering his face with blood. But he dragged himself back to the overturned gun and set it straight again.

The glare of the fire suffused the oasis, casting monstrous black shadows across the moonlit plain. The noise became deafening as the boxes of cartridges exploded, hurling red-hot rifle barrels high in the air, spreading the fire in an ever widening circle. Palm trees blazed like torches, the heat scorched Barney's back.

A dark figure crept up beside him.

"They got Norberg," said d'Auclaire's voice. "*Nous touchons à la fin!* We are nearing the end."

He lay on one side in a stiff, awkward pose.

"You been hit?" inquired Barney.

"Both legs," nodded d'Auclaire.

"Tough luck." He meant it. Not a bad kid, the looie. Level-headed.

A crate of hand-grenades in the heart of the fire blew up like a volcano. Tree trunks, jagged fragments of steel, mangled bodies spouted upward in one mighty swirl of smoke and flame.

"There goes the well," said d'Auclaire as the uproar subsided. "I fixed that."

Barney made no comment. Fatigue had blunted his senses. He was growing dizzy and found it increasingly difficult to keep his one sound eye trained along the gun sights.

Ras-el-Baroud was a seething, smoking cauldron, and the plain, where the dead were scattered, was all silver and scarlet, intolerably bright yet veiled in a haze of drifting dust which made observation almost impossible. The snipers, silenced by the blast of the exploding grenades, were beginning to fire again. And Barney knew that they were edging in closer although their movements were so stealthy that he could not follow them.

"There is another party closing in south of us," said d'Auclaire, and his speech had grown thick and difficult. "They can't be far off now."

"Maybe not," admitted Barney. "God knows we can't stop 'em."

Directly in front of him several natives had raised themselves to their knees. The glare of the leaping flames stained their bare torsos the color of burnished bronze. He braced the gun-butt against his shoulder.

"We're going for a buggy ride," he observed, "but we ain't going alone."

D'Auclaire tried to prop himself up on one elbow, but he was too weak to do so. He fell back, racked with pain, gritting his teeth to keep from crying aloud.

"Wait," he choked as the pain subsided. "I can't reach my revolver. Take it out for me . . now . . before it is too late. I don't want to be taken alive . . . nor do you . . . not by those people."

Barney drew the revolver from the lieutenant's holster and laid it between them.

"I shall have to ask you to assist me when the time comes," d'Auclaire apologized with a flash of his old manner. "I am terribly sorry but my arms are quite useless. You will be doing me a great favor."

A grin straggled across Barney's face. "O.K." he promised. "When the time comes. . ."

"Thank you very much. I could not ask," the lieutenant's voice was very faint, "ask you for a more dependable Legionnaire . . . a better soldier."

His voice trailed off into silence. He sighed deeply and settled down, his cheek resting on the earth, as though he had fallen into a deep sleep. But his eyes remained wide open.

The natives were on their feet now, crouching low, moving step by step toward the blazing trees. Meeting with no opposition, a number of them broke into a slow, shuffling run.

"Yeah!" snarled Barney. "Come on! I'll fix your feet."

The gun rattled into action, but he could no longer hold it steady. The recoil jarred his whole body and the blood spurted from the wound in his left shoulder. Here and there a man dropped, but most of the bullets flew wide, and his assailants ran at him like wolves. The plain seemed to be alive with them.

He pitched the hot gun aside, snatched up d'Auclaire's revolver and pried himself off the ground. Braced against a tree he faced the oncoming mob.

AND ALL at once a new sound beat against his ears. Acrid and high pitched it cut clear above the clamor. It rang in the moonlight till it seemed to fill the whole vast bowl of the sky.

Bugles—bugles in the moonlight, singing to high heaven:

"Y a la goutte ā boire lā-haut.
Y a la goutte ā boire!"
"There's a drop to drink up there!
There's a drop to drink."

There was a quick stirring along the crest of the sand dunes, a glistening flash of steel, and behind the steel came half a battalion of the Legion, deployed in company formation. It poured down into the plain. A volley crashed into the mob which had faced about and was milling in wild disorder. The mob broke, and as it did so a squadron of Spahis, their khaki bournous streaming in the wind, rose up in their stirrups and gave tongue as they rode like a whirlwind in among the screaming tribesmen.

Barney, leaning against the tree trunk, watched the fight roll away across the plain in a towering pillar of dust. He was too weak to move, too dazed to understand what was taking place before his eyes. It seemed to him that he must be dreaming; that the bugles and the Spahis and the lines of troops moving with such orderly precision across the plain must be part of a mirage or vision, some fantastic trick of his swimming brain. In a second or so, he told himself, all this would vanish, and a swarm of skinny, half-naked savages would lay hands on him and hack him to pieces.

A group of men were moving toward him. They looked astonishingly like Legionnaires, but he knew that this could not be. He did not try to pick up the revolver for he felt sure that if he moved away from the tree he would collapse.

"Come on, you baboons," he muttered. "I can take it."

But the hallucination persisted and he was mildly astonished to see quite a number of men who could easily have been mistaken for officers ride up ahead of the soldiers, dismount, and come toward him.

"For God's sake," he said aloud. "I've gone nuts."

One of the officers bore a startling resemblance to Aromanche, the battalion commander he had seen the day of the dress parade at Ain Fezzoul. Same gray whiskers, same bushy eyebrows, same rat-trap of a mouth. It did not begin to make sense.

"I can take it," repeated Barney. "Do your stuff What the hell are you waiting for?"

His astonishment turned to utter bewilderment when the apparition halted six paces away, drew himself up and, of all impossible things, instead of becoming a blood-thirsty Moroccan, carried his hand to the peak of his cap. And the officers lined up behind him were saluting too!

"Am I cockeyed?" wondered Barney. "Or am I cockeyed?"

He heard the apparition say, "Legionnaire—" and he realized that this was no ghost, but the big shot himself, in flesh and blood.

"Legionnaire!" the one word rolled inside his head, ringing like the tolling of a bell. "Legionnaire!"

With a mighty effort, summoning all his strength, he levered himself away from the tree. Well worn words came unbidden to his lips:

"Detachment all present or accounted for, *mon colonel.*"

And the colonel, who was troubled by a queer catch in his throat, said:

"Where *is* the rest of the detachment?"

The question seemed irrelevant. Through the red glare and the smoke Barney saw them line up, all the hard-boiled eggs: Waldeman and Karkovski, Norberg and Lintz and Bruno and a dozen others, and d'Auclaire was there too, as spick and span and phlegmatic as though he had just stepped out of a bandbox.

He knew they were not there. They were dead. All of them, dead and black and stinking. He had seen them rot before his eyes, but he had to justify himself, he had to answer the colonel's question.

"The detachment is on parade," he

announced. "All present *or* accounted for."

Then the earth rocked crazily beneath his feet and the stars overhead wheeled together in an apocalyptic dance. His legs sagged and the colonel caught him as he fell.

"Where's that confounded doctor!" shouted the colonel, holding the blood-smeared, powder-blackened scarecrow against his clean white tunic. "Damn it, gentlemen, where the devil is he?"

THE medical orderly lit a cigarette and placed it between Barney's lips.

"Just take it easy and relax," he said with professional assurance. "Ride with it. You'll get used to it in a little while."

Barney grunted dismally. Ether fumes welled up in his throat. He ached all over. The stretcher on which he lay was strapped to the sweating and odorous flank of a pack mule. Each step the mule took jarred every bone in his body. A canvas hood protected his bandaged head from the direct rays of the sun.

"And they call this an ambulance!" he complained.

"Of course," retorted the orderly, "heroic Legionnaires like you deserve six-wheeled motor ambulances, but a *cacolet* is the best we can do for you right now. It's not so bad after the first fifty kilometers or so. Why, I've transported some fellows who actually liked the sensation. There's no telling, by the time we reach Ain Fezzoul you may be crazy about it yourself. We'll be there in another couple of days."

Barney puffed on his cigarette, dropping ashes on his bandages. He was silent so long that the orderly bent down to look at him.

"Feeling all right? Want a drink or something?"

"Not now."

"Don't be bashful about it," the orderly insisted sarcastically. "I got my orders. You can have anything you want within reason, lemonade or water with a little wine. The old man doesn't want a dead hero on his hands. He's going to pin that medal on your chest, my lad, right out there before the whole bunch."

Barney squirmed uncomfortably. Ever since he had come out of the ether and found himself strapped on the jolting *cacolet*, the doctor and the orderlies had talked of nothing but this medal he was supposed to get. He didn't give a damn about medals.

"What's eating you?" the orderly inquired. "You don't look happy. Wait till you see the write-up the old man gave you in brigade orders! You can't live this down, my old one. When you step out there on the parade ground at Ain Fezzoul and the drums begin to roll—"

"That's it," said Barney. "Ain Fezzoul."

The orderly gave him a startled look. "What's the matter with Ain Fezzoul?" He checked himself abruptly, sucking air through his teeth. "That's true too," he exclaimed. "You don't know what happened. Hasn't anybody told you?"

"Told me what?"

"About the district commandant. Listen, it's supposed to be confidential, but a man like me, in the hospital, I hear a lot of things. There's been hell to pay at Ain Fezzoul. It seems the old man went down there for a review and got the idea that that outfit of yours was in a lousy mess. He breezed down a couple of days later, nobody expected him, see?—and the lid blew off.

"Riverain said he'd sent your detachment to Bou Sefta, but one of the clerks butted right in with a copy of d'Auclaire's marching orders, and Riverain cracked up. He confessed he'd sent you to Ras el Baroud. Some grudge he had against d'Auclaire. That made a sweet stink: Riverain having hysterics and Aromanche bellowing so you could hear him for miles! He put Riverain under

close arrest. Riverain goes to his room and blows out his brains.

"After that things began to happen. The old man works fast. While the wireless was spitting orders at headquarters, getting the column under way, he went over that company of yours with a fine tooth comb, and did he dig up some dirt! Every sergeant in the XIVth has been demoted, back to the ranks, and Adjutant Casto is going to be courtmartialed. Neglect of duty, abusive treatment, illegal detention! He'll get ten years. Discipline means something in the Legion. You can't monkey with it. You ought to know that."

Barney lay back on his pillow and expelled a lungful of smoke. A tremendous weight had been lifted off his shoulders. The jolting of the *cacolet* no longer bothered him.

The past had been swept away, every last vestige of it. With the passing of Riverain and Casto even the memory of Walsh, the Detroit gangster, had been blotted out. Only Legionnaire Barney remained. And the Legion, as the orderly had said, could not be tampered with. It was hard as steel, incorruptible as gold. And though its purpose was war, with it Barney had at last found peace.

"What the hell's the matter with you?" inquired the orderly. "Have you gone to sleep again?"

"Not yet," grinned Barney. "I was just thinking—"

"About medals and such tripe, I suppose," jeered the orderly. "Step along, Marguerite! We don't need no hardware, the two of us. We wouldn't wear 'em on a bet."

AID AT SEA

By FOSTER DRAKE

THE time-honored rule of the sea that assistance must be given to the distressed up to the limit of endurance is without support in law. The United States Circuit Court of Appeals has decided that neither civil nor criminal liability attaches to the owner of a vessel that ignores a call for help.

Two men in a disabled motor boat sighted a liner and displayed signals of distress. The liner passed on without any indication of seeing them. After drifting for two days they were picked up by a Coast Guard cutter. One of them sued for damages, holding the liner responsible for the two days of suffering and for the cost of subsequent medical attention. The steamship line replied that their vessel did not see the disabled boat.

According to the International Salvage Treaty subscribed to by twenty nations in 1910, every shipmaster is obliged to render assistance to anyone in danger of being lost at sea, even an enemy, provided that the effort does not entail serious danger to his vessel, crew and passengers. But that section of the Treaty is qualified by a further clause stating that the owner of a vessel shall not be held liable for failure to render such assistance.

The annals of the sea, however, attest that sailormen do not stop to consult law books when called upon for aid.

"He went ridin' that lion a hundred feet at a jump."

PECOS BILL

By TEX O'REILLY

"REMINDS me of the summer Pecos Bill moved the scenery out of Kansas and built Pike's Peak."

As our guide, old Veracity Updike, made this remark he was gazing dreamily out across the alkali flat where the dust boiled like surf before the approaching storm. Tompkins and I began to laugh uproariously. Being from the sophisticated East we felt in duty bound to put these old Westerners at ease by laughing at their quaint jokes.

Old Veracity turned and glared menacingly. With his face a mask of anger he slowly eased himself from the saddle. In the same movement he drew his forty-four Winchester from its scabbard, and dropped it in the hollow of his arm, pointing in our general direction.

"Were you two dudes aimin' to poke fun at me," he asked huskily, glaring from one to the other. "We might as well come to an understandin' right now. I don't let no man livin' doubt my word. When I say Pecos Bill moved the scenery out of Kansas, by Gawd, he did it. I ought to know. Wasn't I reared and born out in this country?"

Tompkins and I hastened to assure our sensitive guide that he ranked in the same class as George Washington as far as truth-telling was concerned. Our apologies were made more eloquent by the gestures and frightened look of the fourth member of our party, young Jody Timmins, apprentice cowboy and horse-wrangler.

Old Veracity Updike suspiciously accepted our peaceful protestations, remounted his horse, and trotted on.

"Better lope up a bit," he growled. "That old deserted ranch house is better than a mile ahead. Out of luck if we don't reach it before that dust storm hits. It'll be blowin' the prairie dogs out of their holes in half an hour."

That was the most deserted looking

deserted ranch I ever saw. There was nothing there except a one-room adobe shack flanked by a tumble-down stake corral. Hastily we unsaddled, put our horses in the corral, patched up the gaps with loose boards and piled our saddles and packs in the shack. I seized the opportunity to pull Jody Timmins aside and asked for a report on old Veracity, who had the enviable ability to enforce respect for his stories with a rifle.

"For the Lord's sake don't go to dispute him," Jody whispered. "He's havin' one of his spells. Mostly he's a kind of hermit that don't say nothin', but when he's seized with one of them talkin' fits he's dangerous. Conversation is a vice with that old buzzard.

"He's been tellin' them yarns so long he believes them himself. Especially about his hero, Pecos Bill. Shot the ear off a nester one time for doubtin' one of his whoppers about Pecos Bill. Let him talk till he runs down and dries up."

A FEW minutes later we were all barricaded in the shack while the dust storm roared up out of the desert, bombarding the walls with sand and gravel. The door was nailed fast against the gale and a blanket stuffed in the one small window. Old Veracity went about the job of preparing supper in gloomy silence.

After the meal of canned stuff and well-sanded coffee, we sat back on our bedding rolls and lit our pipes. Something heavier than sand struck the door and Tompkins, startled, exclaimed—

"What was that?"

"That was a cow," the old guide replied. "By this time the wind is blowin' the cows off the range."

I started to laugh, but caught the cold menace in Veracity's eyes.

"Oh, yes, of course, the cows," I agreed. He seemed mollified.

"The worst dust storm ever I heard tell of was the year Pecos Bill staked off New Mexico," he went on, glancing with suspicion from one to the other. "That time it blew all the wells out of the ground and covered the Pacific Ocean three feet deep with mud."

"Pecos Bill must have been a remarkable character," I ventured. "Did you know him."

Veracity sat up with a jerk, loosened his six-shooter in its holster and glared at me. I strained myself trying to register bland innocence. After a tense moment he took his hand off his gun, settled back on his blankets and began refilling his pipe.

"Guess you boys are all right," he grudgingly admitted. "You're just ignorant by the misfortune of environment and natural instinct. Pecos Bill was the greatest man that ever lived. Met him once when I was a youngster. He was carryin' twenty-seven scalps he took that day off an Indian war party. Trouble is that there's been too many lies told about Pecos Bill around Arizona."

"Tell us about him," I urged. "We are intensely interested in the real history of the Old West."

It was like inviting a bird to fly or a fish to swim. The grizzled old guide appraised us with a searching look, heaved a great sigh of relief, and began to let the air sigh through his vocal chords. For three days that dust storm howled around the cabin, and for three days Veracity beseiged our ears with a typhoon of conversation, with short times out for meals or sleep.

"If it hadn't been for old Pecos Bill you easterners wouldn't dare wander around this country now," he declared. "Although Bill never did shoot dudes out of season, there was always blood on the moon when Bill was on the rampage, but he was the soul of honor in his homicidal affairs.

"Bill wasn't handicapped like you fellows by effete surroundings in infancy. He was born about the time Sam Houston discovered Texas, although some say he came from the Lapses."

"Where are the Lapses?" Tompkins inquired.

"Where Missouri laps over into Arkansas," retorted Veracity impatiently. "Bill's mother was a sturdy pioneer woman who once killed forty-five Indians with a broom-handle. They don't raise them kind of women these days.

"His fond mother weaned her child on moonshine liquor when he was three days old, and gave him his daddy's bowie knife to cut his teeth on. His earliest playfellows were the bears and catamounts of east Texas in the bumble bee cotton district."

"What is bumble bee cotton?" I foolishly asked.

"It's the kind a bumble bee has to lay on his back to sip the top blossom," Veracity snarled. By this time his brain was on fire with dammed-up conversation.

"As I was sayin', the family lived in east Texas until Bill was about a year old. Another family moved into the country and located about fifty miles down the river. Bill's old man decided the place was gettin' too crowded, and packed his family in a wagon and headed west.

"One day after they crossed the Pecos River, little Bill fell out of the wagon. As there were sixteen or seventeen other children in the family his fond parents didn't miss him for four or five weeks, and then it was too late to try and find him. Besides another little one had been borned, so you might say his place was filled.

"That's how Bill came to grow up with the coyotes along the Pecos. He learned the coyote language, and used to hunt with them, and sit on the hills nights and howl at the moon. Bein' so young when he got lost he didn't know no better and always thought that he was a coyote. That's where he learned to kill deer by runnin' them to death.

"One day when he was about ten years old a cowboy came along just when Bill matched a fight with two grizzly bears. Bill hugged the two bears to death, tore off a hind leg, and was just sittin' down to breakfast, when this cowboy loped up and asked him what he meant runnin' around naked that way among the varmints.

" 'Why, because I am a varmint,' Bill told him. 'I'm a coyote. One hundred per cent patriotic coyote.'

"The cowboy argued with him that he was a human, but Bill wouldn't believe him.

" 'Ain't I got fleas?' he insisted. 'And don't I howl around all night, like a respectable coyote should do?'

" 'That don't prove nothin',' the cowboy argued. 'All Texans have fleas, and most of them howl. They are the howlingest people what is. I'll prove that you're human.

" 'Did you ever see a coyote that didn't have a tail? Well you ain't got no tail, so that proves you ain't no varmint.'

"Bill turned around and looked, and sure enough he didn't have a tail.

" 'You sure got me out on a limb in this here argument,' admitted Bill. 'I never noticed that before. Shows what higher education will do for a man.

" 'I believe you're right, old-timer. Lead me to humans and I'll throw in with them.'

"So Bill went to town with this learned cowhand, abandoned his decent animal habits, and got to enjoyin' all the pleasant vices of mankind. He threw decency to the winds and decided to be human. Then he got to runnin' with the wild bunch, and sank lower, and lower, until finally he, too, became a cowboy.

"It wasn't long until he was famous as a bad man. He invented the six-shooter, and train robbin', and most of the crimes popular in the Old West. Those minor man-killers couldn't slay in the same class with him.

"There is no way of tellin' just how many men Bill did kill. Deep down he had a tender heart, however, and never killed women or children or bartenders.

He never scalped his victims like most of the second-class bad men of that time. He was too civilized for that. Old Bill used to skin them and tan their hides.

"You believe what I'm tellin', don't you?" Old Veracity sat up and glared at us with the insane light of suppressed conversation in his eyes.

"Oh, indubitably," exclaimed Tompkins hastily.

"Indubitably," I echoed.

"That's all right, that's a good word," Veracity appeared mollified. "Learned that the winter I got educated."

"I noticed that you were an educated man," I interrupted recklessly. "When did it happen and how?"

"Well, let's see," the old guide laid down his pistol and scratched his head. "Lincoln was shot in '65, Custer was massacred in '76, that makes it in the winter of '84. Yes, that's it. That was the year Grover Cleveland was elected, and took the tariff off sheep. That's the winter I got educated.

"IT HAPPENED this way. The railroad came through that year and a freight train got wrecked. One of the box cars went over into the canyon near my camp and busted open. Do you know what that car was loaded with? 22,500 pounds of books. I was just killin' time until spring so I settled down to read.

"That winter I read 11,500 pounds of books, and got a fine education. It got an awful holt on me. Them lyin' books they call fiction I could handle fast; maybe two, three hundred pounds a day, but the dictionaries went slower. Couldn't read over seventy pounds a day. The poetry books were easiest, the lines were shorter. One day I read three hundred pounds of poetry, but that was my best record.

"When the snow went off the ground I was an educated man, and I ain't never been sorry. From time to time I went back to that box car until about the middle of the next winter I finished the whole dad-blamed 22,500 pounds of books. Readin' like that is like opium; it becomes a pernicious habit. So I had to taper off on mail order catalogues and modern novels to kind of disgust myself.

"That's the way I got my learnin' and respect for facts. I remember exactly it was the winter of '84, because Pecos Bill died some time before that.

"Speakin' of Pecos Bill reminds me why he left the Pecos. You see, he killed all the bad men in west Texas, massacred all the Indians, and ate all the buffalo. So he decided to migrate to a new country where hard men still thrived, and a man could pass the time away.

"He saddled up his horse and hit for the West on a high, hard lope. One day he met an old trapper and told him what he was lookin' for.

" 'I want the hardest cow outfit in the world,' he says. 'Not one of them ordinary cow stealin', Mexican killin' bunches of amateurs, but a real hard herd of hand picked hellions that make murder a fine art and take proper pride in their slaughter.'

" 'Stranger, you're headed in the right direction,' answered the trapper. 'Keep right on down this draw for a couple of hundred miles, and you'll find that very outfit. They're so hard they can kick fire out of a flint rock with their bare toes.'

"Bill single-footed down that draw for about a hundred miles that afternoon, then he happened to an accident. His horse stubbed his toe on a mountain, and broke his leg, leavin' Bill afoot. He slung his saddle over his shoulder and went off hikin' down that draw, cussin' and a-swearin'. Profanity was a gift with Bill.

"All at once a big ten-foot rattlesnake quiled up in his path, set his tail to singin', and allowed he'd like to match a fight. Bill laid down his saddle, and just to be fair about it, he gave the snake the first three bites. Then he waded into that reptile and everlastingly frailed the pizen out of him.

"By and by that old rattler yelled for mercy, and admitted that when it came to fightin', Bill started where he left off. So Bill picked up his saddle and hiked on, carryin' the snake in his hand like a whip, and snappin' the eyes out of the Gila monsters along the trail.

"About fifty miles further on a big old mountain lion jumped off a cliff and lit all spraddled out on Bill's neck. This was no ordinary lion. It weighed more than three steers and a yearlin'.

"Kind of chucklin' to himself Bill laid down his saddle and his snake and went into action. In a minute the fur was flyin' down the canyon until it darkened the sun. The way Bill knocked the animosity out of that lion was a shame. In about three minutes that lion hollered:

" 'I'll give up, Bill. Can't you take a joke?'

"Bill let him up, and then he cinched the saddle on him and went down the canyon whoopin' and yellin', ridin' that lion a hundred feet at a jump, and quirtin' him down the flank with the rattlesnake. It must of been a stimulatin' and fearsome sight.

"It wasn't long before he saw a chuck wagon, with a bunch of cowboys squattin' around it. He rode up to that wagon, curdlin' the air with his war whoops, with that lion a-screechin' and that snake a-singin' his rattles.

"When he came to the fire he grabbed the old lion by the ears, jerked him back on his haunches, stepped off him, hung his snake around his neck, and looked the outfit over. Them cowboys just sat there sayin' less than nothin'.

"Bill was hungry after his trip, and seein' a boiler full of beans cookin' on the fire, he scooped up a few handfuls and swallowed them, washin' them down with a few gallons of boilin' coffee out of the pot. Wipin' his mouth on a handful of prickly pear cactus Bill turned to the cowboys and bellowed:

" 'Who the hell is boss around here?'

"A big puncher about eight feet high, with seven pistols and nine bowie knives in his belt, riz up, and takin' off his hat like he was beggin' somebody's pardon, says:

" 'Stranger, I was, but you be.'

"OLD BILL had a right pleasant time with this cow outfit. It was about this time he staked out New Mexico for a ranch, and used Arizona for a calf pasture. It was there he found his famous horse, Widow-Maker. He raised him from a colt on nitroglycerin and dynamite, and Bill was the only man that could throw a leg over him.

"I have heard tell of one time when he was throwed. The facts weren't no disgrace to him. He made a bet with Jesse James that he could ride an Oklahoma cyclone slick-heeled, without a saddle.

"He met the cyclone, the worst that ever blowed, up on the Kansas line. Bill eared that old tornado down with one hand and climbed on its back. That cyclone did some pitchin' that would be unbelievable if it weren't sworn to by many truth-tellin' witnesses.

"Down across Texas it went, sunfishin', back-flippin', side-windin', blowin' holes inside out, knockin' mountains down, and tyin' rivers into knots. The Staked Plains used to be heavily timbered until that big wind swiped the trees off and left it a bare prairie.

"Bill just sat up there smilin', thumbin' that cyclone in the withers, floppin' it across the ears with his hat, and rollin' a cigarette with one hand. He rode it through three states but over in Arizona it got him.

"When it found it couldn't throw him, it rained out from under him. This is proved to the satisfaction of everybody except a natural born skeptic, by the fact that it washed out the Grand Canyon.

"Bill came down in a sitting posture over in California. He made such a dent in the ground that the spot where he hit

is now known as Death Valley, a hole in the ground more than a hundred foot below sea-level. The print of his hip pockets can still be seen in the granite. A fall like that would have hurt anybody except Pecos Bill.

"Some of these modern historians that go around dehorning history without a proper veneration for facts, claim that Bill wasn't throwed. They say he slid down a streak of lightnin'. They also hold that Bill dug the canyon one week when he was prospectin', but the facts speak for themselves. There is the canyon, and there is Death Valley, and where is that cyclone?

"In his idle moments on his New Mexico ranch Bill amused himself puttin' thorns on the trees and horns on the toads. He invented the centiped and tarantula, and taught them how to bite, just as a joke on his friends. He had a notorious sense of humor.

"When the cow business was dull Bill used to try his hand at different little chores, like the time he took a contract to supply the S. P. railroad with wood. He hired a few hundred Mexicans to chop and haul the wood to the railroad line. As pay for the job he gave each Mexican one-fourth of the wood he hauled.

"These Mexicans are funny people. After they got the wood they didn't know what to do with it, so Bill took it off their hands and never charged them a cent. He was big-hearted that way. He could take anybody's money and not leave him feelin' under obligations.

"Another time Bill took the job of buildin' the line fence that makes the boundary from El Paso across to the Pacific. He rounded up a bunch of prairie dogs and set them to diggin' holes, which by nature a prairie dog likes to do. Whenever one of them finished a hole and settled down to light housekeeping, Bill evicted him and stuck a fence post in the hole.

"Everybody though that was a fine idea, except the prairie dogs. And who cares what a fool prairie dog thinks?"

Old Veracity rose to his feet.

"Time to stop this argument and go to sleep."

"Wonder if the dust storm is over," I ventured.

"Over," snorted Veracity. "It's just started. It'll be worse in the mornin' when it starts to blow back."

"Blow back?" queried Tompkins.

"Certainly, you heard me," growled the old guide. "Stands to reason if all this wind blows out of the country it has to blow back, doesn't it? If it didn't where would we get our wind. The worst part of these dust storms is when they're blowin' back."

Subdued we unrolled our blankets and went to bed.

MAN TO MAN

By LELAND JAMIESON

His aching leg somehow lost it's grip upon the foot-rope. He slipped and in a frozen horror caught himself as his feet swung outward over nothing.

WITH weariness tracing like a liquid fire through each nerve and muscle of his hands and arms, Lieutenant William Brent felt his foot slip from a mesh of netting. His weight sagged down excruciatingly upon the sockets of his shoulders, and he almost fell. But his hands held, and his legs swung down and outward, dangling above five thousand feet of thin, cold, awful space.

His straining, desperate hands were all that held him now, and he knew he couldn't go on up the side of the balloon. He couldn't. And he knew he couldn't last until he could climb down to safety. It would take too long. Cramps knotted in his fingers, and he was getting weaker all the time. The equator of the big, gray, gas-filled bag was level with his shoulder, and he had fifteen feet to climb before he would be safe. Not safe, then, but he could rest. If his fingers grew too weak to hang on now—

Involuntarily, not wanting to look down, yet unable to prevent the movement of his eyes, he saw the earth—remote, impersonal, a mile. It crossed his fevered mind that it would require thirty seconds for his spinning, tumbling body to be drawn by gravity that distance.

Five thousand feet. Down there, he could see roads and lanes of dark green trees, all interlaced around the patterns of the fields. Puffs of dust rose up and drifted off in fan-shaped plumes behind cars that crawled along the roads. Farm buildings were tiny squares set in ordered neatness.

Cold sweat broke out on Bill Brent's face and body as the strain of holding increased. He cried out, his voice weak:

"Lathrop! Climb up and put a line around my ankles! Quick! I can't hold on!"

He heard Lathrop down there in the basket, shouting to him in a panic-stricken tone. It was impossible for Lathrop to get up here soon enough, if at all. The balloon basket dangled almost thirty feet below him. No, he was lost, unless he could climb up—or down. The netting cordage was cutting into his fingers. He fought to swing his feet inward, to dig his toes into a mesh. He kicked. If he could kick a hole in the bag fabric. . . But he couldn't.

All the time, fighting frantically for life, he kept thinking of Major Lathrop in the basket. He hated Lathrop, and Lathrop was the cause of this, and Lathrop would continue living after he had died. He thought desperately, "I've got to get up. . . . If I weren't so weak." But he was weak. He'd had no sleep last night, and had started on this idiotic flight without his breakfast. Lathrop's fault, again.

He was tired . . . so frightened, that everything was muddled in his brain. Somehow things whirled there, passing in a kind of kaleidoscopic horror. He'd never get to be promoted now. Funny. And it was maddening to think that he must die, while Lathrop could leap to safety in the one remaining parachute. Funny. His mind moved in a daze.

He'd had trouble with Major Lathrop, ever since his transfer to Scott Field. Starting with an instant, mutual dislike, there had been a dozen incidents that festered into animosity. The situation, growing tense, had been relieved temporarily when Lathrop went on four months' leave. But last week it had been heightened once more when Lathrop was given an absentee appointment to the promotion examination board.

Bill Brent was to come before that board within a month for examination for promotion to a first lieutenancy. The examination, though routine, could be turned into an inquisition that would ruin any man. Lathrop had no mercy. The penalty for failure with the board was "Class-B."

Thus matters stood when Lathrop returned from leave last night. He had been delayed in getting back, and he had one day remaining in which to put in sixteen hours in the air. If he failed to put in sixteen hours, he lost all four months' flying pay—a matter of seven hundred dollars. So he meant to put it in. But he was an observer, not a pilot, and someone had to fly him for that length of time.

He was not a popular officer on the Post. He was efficient beyond doubt, but was withal petty, choleric, and vindictive toward junior officers. Some people liked him, and he had his good points, certainly; but Bill Brent had never discovered them. So, at the dance last night, when he asked each of several officers to help him fly tomorrow, there were multiple excuses why it was impossible to put in sixteen hours in one day. Lathrop, in desperation, at last went to the officer in charge of flying.

"Captain Deenan," he demanded, "I want you to assign a pilot to take me on my pay hop. I've got to put in four months' time tomorrow!"

Deenan was a red-haired, robust individual. He looked out across the sea of swaying couples on the dance floor. He listened to the rhythm and melody of the splendid orchestra.

"Isn't this," he asked, "a hell of a time to have to think of flying, major?"

"I know," Lathrop said beseechingly. "I'd wait till office hours, but we'll have to get into the air by four A. M. This means seven hundred dollars to me, man!"

Deenan put out his bear-like arm and tagged a passing couple. "Tough," he said. "But I can't order someone up. You'll have to get a volunteer."

Major Lathrop stood there. He watched the couples floating past, but he really didn't see them clearly. He

gave a moan of baffled rage, and just then Bill Brent swept past.

"Ha!" said Lathrop. "Oh, Brent!" His face took on a gentle look of guile. "Oh, Brent, excuse me just a moment, if you will."

"Glad to," Brent said. "Stay as long as you like." He grinned at his girl, a cherubic look of devilment. Behind them, he heard Major Lathrop give a whinny of frustration. Brent said—

"Kid, we'd best be on our way. I'm half tight, and that guy would love to catch me at it. I didn't know the coot was back from leave, or I'd never have touched a drink tonight. I'm up for promotion next month, and he's president of the board—and thatsh bad. I tell you—"

"But Bill," the girl begged in a dark-eyed distress, "you *aren't* awfully tight. This music is too grand."

After a serious contemplation of these factors, Brent agreed, "That's right. Not tight. Shall we go back and find out what that bald-headed major headache wants with me?"

The girl giggled—and then went suddenly tense within his arms. An anger-thinned voice grated on Brent's ears; a hard, quick hand touched him on the shoulder and seemed to turn him on his heels. He blinked, his eyes a trifle owlish, at the enraged crimson visage of Leonard Lathrop half a yard away. In shock, and in astonishment.

Brent gulped. He opened his mouth, but his tongue went oddly thick, vibrating like a flutter valve.

"D-d-dance, major?" he inquired hastily. "Miss Terry, may I present Major Lathrop? . . . You would be charmed . . . goes without saying, naturally. Both charmed. . . . Lovely dance, major."

He paused, momentarily out of verbal ammunition. Brent, in the heat of his enthusiasm, mopped his face, winking at Miss Terry from the protection of his handkerchief, and urging in an alcoholic *sotto voce*: "Go on, babe! I'll wait outside." He smiled fatuously at Major Lathrop. With a quick turn, he started to retreat, depending upon Miss Terry's wiles.

But the wiles were not in operation. Major Lathrop silenced them.

"Thanks, I don't care to dance. Brent, I want to see you."

SO THE terms of this rare bargain were laid out. Providing Bill Brent wanted the promotion board's unequivocal approval, it would be most propitious for him to volunteer to help Lathrop get his flying time tomorrow. It would be wise if Brent appeared at the balloon hangar not later than four tomorrow morning, ready to take off. Of course, it was plainly understood, there was no duress in the matter—no threat.

Angry beyond the point of caution, Bill Brent asked with his hatred all but unconcealed:

"You'd really do this, wouldn't you? Sure you would! All right, I'll meet your game. It's dirty, and it isn't fair. But by act of Congress and by rumor you're a gentleman, so we'll call this a gentlemen's agreement. I'll put in that time for you—and you'll pass me for promotion. And some day, Lathrop, you'll remember this again!"

Major Lathrop retorted with a grim, dangerous sibilancy, "Careful, Brent. You're pretty junior to forget yourself. I'm not forcing you to anything, remember. But it would sound a little unbecoming if I should report to the board that you've been drunk half a dozen times since being transferred here. So you'd better hold your tongue!"

"I'm not drunk," Brent grated. "I haven't been drunk. I don't go crazy when I smell a cork, like—" He broke off abruptly. There was no use in going on. This was a martinet whom he was facing, a man who did not represent the Army system, yet who was able to appear as something out of it.

"All right, sir," Brent said softly, leering out of black, cold-sober eyes. "A gentlemen's agreement. I'll keep the flight in mind."

"At four o'clock," repeated Lathrop, and swung on his heel in a very military splendor and marched out into the night.

At three twenty-five he appeared at the mouth of the cavernous balloon hangar in the center of the field, completely sober, and not a little grim. He didn't like his task. The wind was coming up as morning neared, and this long day would be a violent one. Silently he cursed all majors and all promotion boards, and, as the ground crew reported sleepily for duty, ordered them about their task.

So, in the thick morning darkness, at precisely four o'clock, when Major Lathrop screeched his tires to a stop upon the concrete ramp, the kite balloon was ready, the landing lines held by a dozen members of the crew, and Brent was in the basket, yawning and shivering from the chill, damp air. Lathrop stepped daintily to the basket and clambered in across the wicker rim with a terse, unfriendly, "Morning, Brent. I see you got here, after all."

Brent nodded, and then called out to the crew sergeant, "Start the winch motor, and then drop the lines."

There was a delay, while dew collected on the vast black back of the balloon and trickled down and dripped to the concrete. The hangar floodlights cast an eerie pall of brightness on the grayish-silver nose, outlining the rigging and the basket and the circle of men grouped there in silhouette and clinging to the landing lines. The basket dangled far below the elephantine belly, just above the ground, and swayed gently as the big bag tugged against the human weights that held it fast.

Brent always liked to fly at dawn, and a take-off such as this had always brought a sense of competence and faint excitement in the past. But standing here, feeling Major Lathrop's precise, efficient presence there behind him, all the zest was taken out of this ascension. This was work, done under a threat of fear. Brent thought, "Just my luck for something to go hay-wire on this flight." Bitterly he pushed aside that possibility, and looked up to find the stars. The sky, the portion which was visible beyond the rounding sides of the great craft, was patched with small black clouds that scudded on the upper air, revealing and then covering a deeper black beyond. There was going to be a wind, all right.

The winch motor barked and settled to its chugging cadence; the crew sergeant shouted a crisp order; and the balloon lurched suddenly against the cable. After a period spent in "walking" it to a position where it would clear the corner of the hangar, the ground crew let the lines pay out through empty hands, and the great craft surged high as the winch operator slacked off on his brake.

No sounds reached them except the faint sigh of the wind through rigging, and the distant *pup-pup-pup* of the winch. The earth flattened darkly under them.

At a thousand feet, Brent braced himself against the already surging basket, and spoke into his telephone:

"Hold us here. Sergeant, leave an emergency crew on duty, and dismiss the others."

"Right, sir." The two words drifted up the line, and then silence. The ball-shaped floodlights blinked out quickly; the earth was remote and far away.

So, with the night pushing in around them, they began a boring, endless flight. Major Lathrop was not a social man, and Brent was in no mood for conversation. The hours passed, somehow. The sun pushed up through morning haze, a burnished copper plate. The earth brightened, but Brent's spirits grew steadily more dulled with weariness and lack of sleep.

The wind picked up. Lathrop, at ease

with a stay in each hand, relaxed and took the shocks on flexed and steady knees. His handsome, severe face, revealed a thin-lipped satisfaction as the time wore itself away. He didn't mind rough air, for it was paying him more than forty dollars every hour he stayed here.

But two hours after sun-up, Bill Brent broke the silence in a thin, strained voice, "Don't think we can hold out, sir," he said, and all reliance seemed to have vanished in his being. "Cable might break." He did not speak again for several mintes, while the wind smashed into the nose in violent gusts that depressed it intermittently, and sent air sighing through the ballonet valves.

Slowly Bill Brent took on a faintly greenish hue as illness overcame him with the pounding lurch and swinging of the basket. In silence he endured it, while Lathrop looked on without show of sympathy. Once Lathrop said—

"That shows what drinking does to you."

Brent groaned something unintelligible. He was sick until it seemed impossible to endure the strain of knotting stomach muscles. The basket seemed like the fantastic, waving palm of some demon in a dervish dance. And, while suffering a dozen agonies, a sudden fear took hold of him as the balloon came up from a lunging dive and took the slack out of the cable. This could not continue. The cable would snap before many onslaughts of that kind—and in this wind, a balloon adrift would be a balloon forever lost.

"If that cable snaps," he moaned, "we'll have to jump out of this thing. You wouldn't get your flying time, and I'd get a trial for flying this kite unnecessarily in such wind. We'd best go down."

Doubt for a moment showed on Lathrop's face. He knew Brent was a balloonist noted for skill and daring in the air; he knew, if Brent said so, that it was dangerous to remain. But seven hundred dollars . . . The thought of losing it was maddening. He purred, "You know your business, Brent. Don't forget the agreement we had made. I expect you to fly something—and get in all my time."

Bill Brent, wretched in his agony, cried in bitter, thin-voiced bafflement—

"What difference is there between a B-board and a military court? But I'm damned if I'm going to lose my commission and the balloon trying to help you earn your dough. . . . Sergeant!" he shouted in the telephone. "Haul us down —before the wind takes us clear away from you." A moment passed in hard, tense silence, and then, from far below, the stuttering of the winch exhaust drifted up to them upon the gusty air.

For a time it seemed uncertain whether the wind or winch would win. The balloon, nosing down as the cable was pulled in, dived suddenly. The cable, slack, looped and coiled and fell away against the wind, but the big bag, like something angry and alive, continued in its plunge. Brent, forgetting sickness, held a stay in one hand and the telephone mouthpiece in the other. "Steady!" he shrieked to the winch operator. "Slack off. Pay out!" The earth seemed rising up to smack the basket.

Fervently Brent swore. Behind him he did not hear Lathrop's gasp of astonishment and fear, did not see Lathrop's knuckles go white as his fingers gripped down upon their stays. The balloon swooped down to a scant two hundred feet, and then, nosing upward in a peculiar twisting turn, climbed as rapidly as it had dived. And Brent once more was yelling orders in the telephone, to help the operator coordinate the tautening of the cable at the proper moment.

AT LAST they were upon the ground. The landing crew walked the bag into the hangar lee, and Lathrop climbed to the concrete, and Brent behind him. To Brent's surprise, Major Lathrop said

in a quiet, faintly unnerved voice—

"Splendid, Brent. I sincerely wish to compliment you on your handling that balloon!"

Brent grinned. He looked at Lathrop squarely, and said:

"Sorry, sir, but I guess we can't put in the flying time. I think you'll admit I did the best I could—but with this wind, it isn't possible with a kite balloon."

Lathrop nodded two or three times, looking up at drifting, scudding clouds. "I understand," he said. He was worried. "I don't know anything about it, but couldn't you put up a free balloon on the end of a cable, and finish out the time? It shouldn't jump around so much, I think. It would be smaller, and the cable wouldn't break. I've got to get that flying time. I've *got* to have the money, Brent."

Brent shook his head—

"Colonel Paxton would never let us have a free balloon for such a purpose, in this wind."

"But you'll try it, if I get authority," Lathrop put in quickly. "That is our agreement, after all."

Wearily Brent said:

"Yes. Yes, this is a gentlemen's agreement, isn't it? But you'll never get the colonel's word to go ahead on this."

To his astonishment, Lathrop came back some minutes later with authority to attempt the wild thing. Standing in the maw-like interior of the hangar, he looked in disgust at the row of training blimps, at the semi-rigid experimental job, at the half dozen free balloons that were sand-bagged to the floor. He was incredibly weary, exceedingly reluctant to go up once more in that wind. But if he didn't— He knew Lathrop. If he went ahead and made the effort, even if he failed, Lathrop might not stick to the exact letter of his threat.

He said—"Major, have you ever been up in a free balloon moored to the ground?"

"No, but let's get under way. Time is passing, and we'll have to fly till long after darkness as it is."

Suddenly Brent smiled, a quick, terse, startled smile.

"Right, sir. You asked for it, and here we go. But if this stunt gets out of hand, God knows what we're going to do, with all this wind." He stared for a moment at the racing clouds.

"The idea behind all this," Lathrop returned, climbing into the wicker basket, "is to hurry up and do my flying time. We can discuss the matter in the air. For the present, let's presume we have nothing more to say!"

Brent, nodded, directing the crew. He got into the basket wordlessly, yet filled with a peculiar satisfaction and anticipation.

They took off, with the winch cable attached securely to the load ring of the craft. They climbed into the wind, and the winch halted them by prearrangement at a scant five hundred feet, for Brent wanted to be in a position to be hauled down quickly in emergency. And there they sat.

The balloon took no wildly plunging dives, as the kite had done. Instead, it slowly rotated, accelerating until the cable was wound tight, then spinning back. The cable, each time, wound around the stays, around the basket, and around the bulky packs containing the parachutes—below the basket. Brent, sweating with exertion, wore out his hands against that cable trying to keep from fouling something as the basket turned.

This balloon had the old-type Stevens' 'chutes, the canopies of which were cased in bags, from which, in turn, manila lines came up across the rim. To jump, each man snapped his 'chute line to the harness which he wore already, and bailed out, taking care to jump in such a way that his line would clear the basket stays.

But at the third "spin" of the balloon, it became apparent that there would be little jumping from this basket, even if

an emergency arose. Brent, fighting the taut cable with both bleeding hands, cried—

"Major, watch the 'chute bags!" but it was too late. The cable sawed into one of them and ripped it from its moorings. The bag, parachute inside, fell heavily away. For a long minute Brent spent himself in swearing, adding,

"If I ever saw a crazy way to fly!"

Lathrop did not answer. He was clutching a stay in each hand with a glassy look of desperation. The balloon's motion was a dreadful thing. The earth was a vast flat plate that spun and spun. The sky was blue and filled with clouds that chased each other endlessly around a giddy orbit toward infinity. And Lathrop, suddenly bending his head below the rim, gasped out a weak surrender there.

"I can't stand this motion, Brent," he groaned. "Signal the winch to pull us down, and we'll wait a while before we try again."

A vindictive satisfaction in his voice, Brent asked, "Can I help you, sir? Really, I—"

But he said no more. Just then a crisp metallic crackling came above his head. Something flicked past his ear with a faint hiss. The basket, released from the cable, was flung through a violent arc. Cold with dread and understanding, Brent stared up at the load ring—at the frayed stub of a cable end which had worn out from all the twisting, bending it had had. He breathed, "God, major! We're adrift!" in a tone of frightened awe, and reached to valve. With this wind, he couldn't land. That would be fatal. Even if he stayed low above the trees, the wind would carry him three hundred miles or more, by darkness. No telling where. He jerked the valve cord hard.

Nothing happened. The cord was solid, rigid, as if fixed permanently to a stay. The balloon was climbing at a thousand feet a minute, now. The field already was a long, long way below.

In a moment of debate, he heard Lathrop sigh heavily with relief and say, "U-u-ugh! This is better. We can go on now and finish out my flying time. . . . Brent, isn't this better, now?"

Brent didn't answer, thinking. He could rip the bag right here, and parachute to earth—but he would hit at thirty-five or forty miles an hour. Might kill both of them. Certainly destroy the balloon . . . But he could open the rip panel just enough to use the aperture for valving, and stay low. That was the thing! He grabbed the red rip panel cord and bore down on it with a quick, arrested jerk.

But it was fast, up there in the bag! In a quick, prickly desperation, he looked upward at the patched vents through which the cords disappeared into the bag. He flailed the lines with frantic vigor . . . fruitlessly. Evidently they had been fouled by that quick reversal of the spinning motion. Brent's lips went flat, and he sucked chill air into his lungs. The balloon was rocketing. Already the air was getting cold, and thin. An ominous, dead silence clung to them.

Panic hovered over Lieutenant William Brent. In a brittle, jagged voice he said, "This may be perhaps . . . fatal. We can't both jump. I'll have to stay with the balloon. You go on and use the parachute, when it's time."

Major Lathrop was long silent. Finally he looked quizzically at Brent. Tears of agony had dried themselves upon his cheeks, and his uniform was not a thing of beauty now. He said—

"Brent, I know you don't like me. Why don't you use that 'chute yourself?"

Brent coughed as cold air bit into his lungs. "I'm the pilot," he muttered. "If I jumped out and left you, you wouldn't have a chance."

Lathrop smiled faintly. Somehow his austerity and razor-edged efficiency were gone, and there was something wistful and kindly in his face. He asked softly,

"A lot of people would be glad if something like that happened."

Impatiently Brent answered, "I don't like you, true. But whatever it may be worth, you're entitled to your chance up here, even though you are to blame for taking off. I'm not doing it alone for you. If I lose this damn' balloon, and live, I'll go to trial for it!"

Lathrop said slowly: "Perhaps I'd better tell you why I had to have my flying pay. No need to mention names. I had to have that money to save the reputation of a man. Knowing me, you may think that incredible. However, it is true. No one would try to help me fly, so I resorted to a threat." He paused, and held Brent's puzzled eyes, and finally added, "A threat, Brent, that would certainly never have been carried out. . . . But the thing now is to go on and get this flying time."

Bill Brent said nothing, as his thoughts went on and on at a tremendous speed in a queer jumble. He remembered a Post rumor that Lathrop had a grown son, weak and worthless, and wayward, on whom a father's intense and sharply focused affection had no affect. Merely rumor. Yet now, as Brent glanced at Lathrop questioningly, he saw a face gone sad and worn and tired.

Something happened to Brent then. He knew that Lathrop was not merely putting on an act for him. Lacking all details, he knew that this flying pay was almost equal in importance to existence, as far as Lathrop was concerned. He would never grow to like a man so cold, so utterly impersonal as Lathrop; but some of the intense and bitter hatred he had held was appeased.

YET THAT change did not relieve the situation. This balloon would climb to fifteen or twenty thousand feet and remain there countless hours unless some means of valving were devised. At that level it would streak northeast at a stupendous speed. On and on—out of the United States and into Canada; out of Canada, perhaps to descend a derelict upon arctic sea.

Staring at the receding earth, Brent thought of climbing up the foot-ropes and trying to slash the bottom of the gas bag with his knife. But that would do no good; the gas was in the top of the balloon. No, there seemed no way, except to wait on the eventual descent that would come through seepage of the bag.

Then, trembling a little from the chill the sudden thought created in him, he considered climbing up the outward slanting footropes, and into the netting that surrounded the inflated bag, and finally to the top, where he could valve.

He shuddered realizing the hazard. He could not wear a safety line, tied to the parachute, or to the load ring: its weight and encumbrance would hinder him. He must go up, and unprotected—and he must not fail.

If he delayed, he would lose his nerve. So he started. He said:

"Major, the only hope we've got of coming down in civilization is to valve this bubble—and get started quickly." He swung up to the load ring, and stood poised there, calculating. From here, the footing radiated in a flaring, inverted cone and joined the netting that surrounded the gray envelope. Breathlessly cautious, Brent wrapped his legs around two of these slim ropes and started arduously to climb. Lathrop, below, called out the warning, "Watch it! God, Brent. Can't you use the drag rope for a sling, in case you—"

"Too heavy," Brent grunted. "I'm not going to fall." But his tone was not altogether confident, and he was almost afraid to breathe.

It was slow; it was precarious. He climbed inch by inch, trying to crowd his mind away from that awful, mile-deep chasm of thin air. The violent exertion

left him panting after a half a dozen feet. But steadily he fought his way.

He reached the netting, offering a silent prayer of thankfulness. Here he had the meshes to curl aching fingers around, and he could make swifter progress, so he thought. He found that quite untrue. The meshes were diamond-shaped, and large, and his arms were now so weary that he could scarcely hold himself with one hand while he reached aloft for a new purchase. The strain was terrible and endless.

And, almost to the equator, where the climb would have become vertical and thereby easier, his aching leg somehow lost its grip upon the foot-rope it was wrapped around. He slipped down unexpectedly—slipped, and in a frozen horror caught himself as his feet swung outward over nothing.

Below, he heard Major Lathrop's gasping, horrified ejaculation. All but exhausted, he clung there, trying not to watch the ground.

If he could get a footing, get up high enough to swing his feet into a mesh, and stand . . . He was so exhausted that he could not draw his legs up to the meshes. Thus he clung, strength ebbing, swearing and sobbing as the realization of the certainty of this thing grew upon him. He was . . . gone.

Lathrop called in an excited tone, "Swing your feet in—swing your feet in —wrap a leg around the rope—you only have another foot or so to go!"

Brent was too weak. He moaned—

"Can't . . . For God's sake climb up and put a loop of the drag line around my ankles! Quick! . . ."

Sobbing in desperation, Brent kicked and swung to grip the rope. His eyes were blurred from strain. A giddiness and kind of nausea swept over him, blending with the weakness that was in him now. He had a mesh knot in each hand, and the right one slowly started to slide out from underneath his clawing fingers——There was nothing he could do. He lost it.

His dangling form dropped four inches, and a hot, penetrating fear drove through him. Not knowing how he did it, he drove his fist hard against the fabric of the bag, and guided it around two mesh cords until he hooked them with a sharp, crooked elbow. And when his other hand could stand the strain no longer, he hung in this position, his weight upon his helplessly wedged arm. He could not fall. After five panting minutes, he had regained strength enough to start the climb again. His feet came level with the netting, and after that he went on up and dropped exhausted on the sloping crown of the balloon.

For a long time he lay there in a kind of stupor.

The valve was at the apex of the bag, and finally he reached out one arm and pressed down on one valve flap, to open it. Hydrogen sighed past his face, and in a queer elation, he lay there, valving, while the balloon drifted in dead silence through the upper air.

So, at last, they started down. This was at eleven thousand feet, and Brent lay flat upon his grayish-silver cushion, his view restricted by the round sides. He could land the bag from here, once darkness brought a decrease in the velocity of the surface wind. He was not certainly, going to climb back down those ropes. . . . But he was thinking little, as he lay there.

Two hours lengthened into three, and then to four. The balloon was now at seven hundred feet, and dusk was crowding in upon them from the west. The surface wind was still too strong to land, and Brent was afraid to delay much after dark. A landing now would wreck them, and a landing then would do the same. And peculiarly, he was restrained by the thought that Lathrop had not as yet put in all his flying time!

Lathrop called up through the stillness of the evening air, "Where are we,

Brent? No maps in the basket. Do you know our position?"

Brent laughed dryly, "Not within a hundred miles. Do you?"

"No, but we may drift over Lake Michigan. We've been traveling toward it all the time."

Brent's voice showed the strain of sleeplessness. He called, "Watch for it! With night coming, the gas is contracting and we're going down. If we ever start across that lake, we'll be dunked right in the middle of it—we'll never get across!" And he added, "We've done the best we can."

"Yes," Lathrop returned moodily. "Yes, we've done the best we can."

NIGHT came on, and town lights twinkled here and there. To the northwest a haze of brilliance built up against the scattered clouds that drifted at two thousand feet. Brent watched it, curious.

And suddenly he understood. That glow came from Chicago. Lake Michigan was not a dozen miles away!

So it was land, and land now, and take his chances in this wind. A trembling excitement took possession of him as he pushed down on the valve, yelling: "The lake's ahead! Throw out the drag rope, major. This is going to be a rough one—if we get away with it!"

Lathrop answered, "Drag-line over, with the anchor attached. Now what shall I do?" There was agitation in his voice, and disappointment, and a certain bitterness; but there was no fear. Then suddenly there was fear. Brent, from this perch upon the rounded top, could see nothing of the earth directly underneath. He heard the major barking:

"Quick, Brent! Water under us already! Valve us down!"

Blindly Brent pushed once more on the valve. If he could have released most of the gas suddenly, the balloon would have dropped easily into a field; but he could not do this. The gas flowed out, and the balloon settled, settled, while scudding at twenty or twenty-five miles an hour on the wind. If there were obstructions down there—

And apparently there were! A shudder passed up through the drag line to the basket, and thence to Brent in milder form. A dull *ping* rang out from somewhere underneath, and then a staccato, tinny clattering that rose to an unearthly din. The anchor had hooked itself into a windmill. It came loose, and the balloon, slowed for a moment, sank closer to the ground. Lathrop screamed,

"Going to smack a barn!"

Brent tried to strain his eyes into the darkness. The impact came almost with the major's words. There was a *r-r-r-ut!* of smashing wicker, and the basket bounced and came up hard against wall again. This time it stopped, but, carried onward by the force of wind, the balloon swung over violently.

And Lieutenant William Brent, caught unprepared, was rolled and catapulted through darkness and horrifying space, to land on hands and knees upon a sloping surface, cat-like, clawing and scratching for support. He had no time to orient himself, before gravity started him upon another plunge. Somewhere below, he heard Lathrop's frantic bellowing: "Brent! Brent! Give a hand! Gimme a hand before we get away!"

But Brent had no opportunity. Sliding helplessly along the roof, he passed the basket in the dark, catching a fleeting glimpse of Major Lathrop bending double across the wicker rim, trying to get a finger-hold among the shingles! Shingles were ripping up, nails screaming protest. Then the sight was lost as Brent grabbed at the basket for support—and missed.

Somewhere below there, he found the drag-rope with flailing hands. By that time he was halfway down across the eave, too far to get back. So he slid

on down, and finally felt his feet sink into a muddy ooze.

Lathrop, all this time, had been scratching up shingles from the roof, losing his grip, then finding another one. And Lathrop, throughout this losing struggle, continued to cry in futile anguish, "Brent! Oh, Brent! I'm holding it, but it's going to get away!"

Brent found the drag-rope end, and he found a tree and looped the line around it. A moment after that Lathrop felt the roof slip out beyond his hands. He all but lost his balance, and then hung there precariously, shouting to Brent that the balloon was taking off again.

With a heavy tug, the balloon came up against the rope. Brent, watching its swinging hulk there in the gloom, called, "I'm on the ground. You're anchored. Everything is okay now."

"Pull me down," Lathrop ordered. "The lake's too close. We've done our best." There was bitterness and worry in his tone.

That morning, Bill Brent would have pulled the basket down, taking a vindictive pleasure in seeing Lathrop lose that seven hundred dollars. But now he hesitated. Lathrop, no doubt, had thought he needed disciplining; Lathrop, Brent believed, at least had been sincere. And desperate. Brent stood there in the darkness, thinking that the Army would have to pay the damage on that windmill and this roof. It was tough that Lathrop couldn't get his flying time.

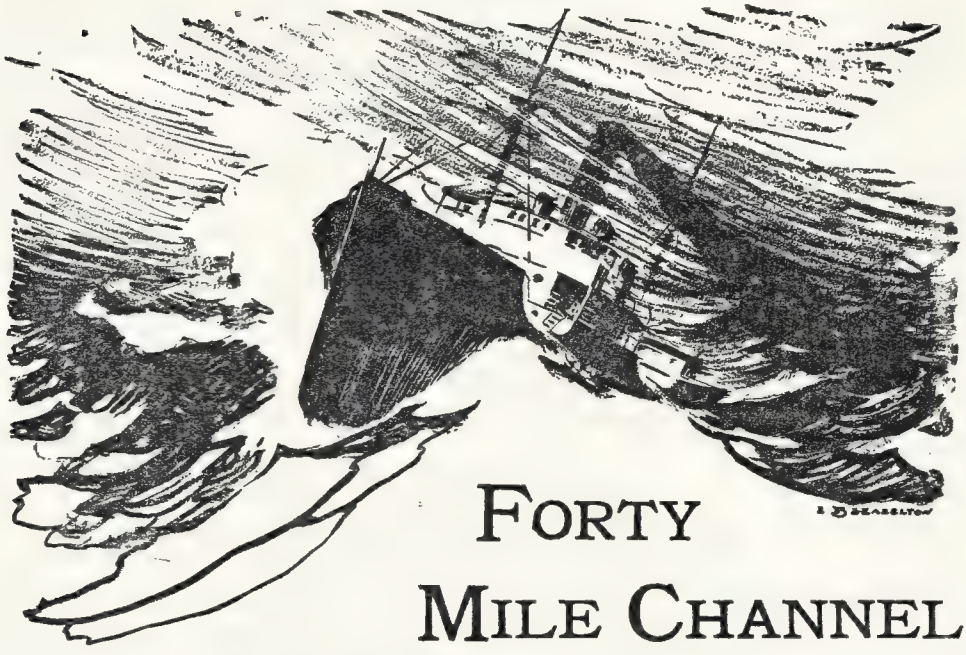
But a new thought came to him. He yelled—

"Curl up in that basket and try to get some sleep. I'm going to hunt a bed, myself. Without my weight, the balloon will ride all night. In the morning I'll come out and pull you down—and be a witness to the fact that you spent eight more hours in the air!"

Incredulity, and relief, and a faint husk were in the major's voice. He laughed nervously.

"All right. Thanks, Brent. But for God's sake, don't over-sleep. This outfit is already starting to whirl!"

THEODORE FREDENBURGH



FORTY MILE CHANNEL

CAPTAIN JEREMY BROUGHTON of the S. S. *Red Wing* was a small man with gray hair that swirled tightly on his round head. His narrow face looked to be hand-chiseled from red-brown wood and it had a grayish cast as if salt rime had got into the pores beyond removing.

At fifteen he had lain out on the royal yard of a windjammer off Cape Stiff and, frozen into his clothes, found out what a winter westing of the Horn was like. The boy should have died but didn't; instead, at seventy-one, he was tough as a log and, for all his small size, had the staying power of Satan himself.

The *Red Wing?* She's a five thousand ton ocean tramp owned by the Blake people of Baltimore. At this time she was south and west of Key West, in ballast from Vera Cruz to Baltimore, and there wasn't a breath of air, or a sound, or the sign of other shipping around the whole glittering ring of the horizon.

Maybe you have seen such a day in the Gulf? The sun seems to hang a few feet over the gaff and is ringed around with blazing bracelets that shimmer and overlap one another; the sea is a disc of polished steel with an invisible film of oilslick on it.

Hot and quiet.

Still.

Nothing there but the *Red Wing* thumping along; and without cargo to set her down she looked lanky and rolled a little, though the sea barely breathed. On top, Dyke Martin, the second officer, lounged in the portside bridge-wing watching a school of porpoise frolic under the forefoot. He stirred squinting toward the wheelhouse as Dringall, the Chief Mate, slammed on deck from the Captain's room and angrily clattered down the ladder to the main-deck below.

With a dry satisfied grin, Martin turned back to watch the porpoise. He squandered no love on Dringall and the scowl on the First Mate's face told him that Dringall had come off second best

in a row with Old Man Broughton.

Dringall was brother to T. P. Dringall, Port Captain of the fleet and son-in-law to "Fin" Roarty, the presiding genius of Blake Lines, Inc. Dringall had got a ship through his brother's effort and, when hard times came, had been set back to First Mate and put aboard Broughton's ship; a disappointed and ambitious man who had not learned sailoring in the bitter school which had hatched Broughton and, in a lesser way, Dyke Martin. Necessarily young Martin went from First Mate to Second.

Dringall had begun by overhauling the *Red Wing* from main truck to keelson; building the idea, you see, that nobody in the *Red Wing* had seamanship or interest enough to care properly for the ship and gear.

Martin had watched, said nothing, and discharged his duty without complaint. Broughton had looked on with his sharp old hawk's eyes and suspected that Dringall was not without encouragement from his fond brother, Port Captain of the Fleet; and he payed out plenty of rope waiting for Mr. Dringall to trip in a bight of his own making. And trip he did, for this affair off Key West was the beginning of the snarl that delivered him bound to the Port Authority and proved again that Old Jeremy Broughton was a tough one to beat.

It was like this.

Sparks had come down through all the still white heat with news of a hurricane that was swinging around Cuba on the way to spread itself in the Gulf.

To a Master whose ship is found with fuel, sea room to spare, and enough draft to give stability, there is nothing terrifying about a hurricane. But, for the Master whose ship is like a hollow iron wedge set apoint; a ship whose empty black holds echo the growl of sea water clawing the plates outside, and whose lanky unsteadiness runs mildly to blind staggers in a still sea, news of an approaching hurricane is bad news, indeed.

Broughton, who was laid up in his cabin with a broken left leg and a tropical fever that had wracked him bug-eyed, conned the message and sent for his Chief Officer, Mr. Dringall.

"I think we might put into Havana," he said, his eyes agoggle with fever, "until we see how this goes."

"Yeah?" Dringall sneered, seeing an old man about to fold up with fever and the drag of a broken left leg. "Accordin' to all reports, that blow will pass astern. We will be clear before it hits. We'll only get a hatful of it."

"Still," Broughton persisted patiently, "I think Havana will be safer than the Florida Straits until we see how things are going to go."

But Dringall didn't like it that way. He wanted Broughton to make a mistake and he didn't care how it came about.

"We're under orders to make Baltimore in a hurry. Don't forget that," he warned Broughton. "The company has use for us."

"I know that. But she's not deep enough to stand a heavy blow in these waters. We won't lose much time. Put in at Havana."

"Put in?" Dringall cried scornfully. "We'll do nothing of the kind. Why, you're crazy with fever right now. Anyone can see you're a wreck. Do you think I am going to be responsible for orders given by a fever-ridden skipper who's half mad and delirious?"

"You will take my orders while I am Master here," said Broughton, still mild.

"A Master is a man fit to command," Dringall spat in the nastiest voice he could muster up. "I'll take orders from such a man; but I'll not take them from a fever-stricken wreck."

That last crack got old Broughton. With his face like dirty yellow parchment, and his eyes burning caverns of pain, he reared up among his pillows. Like some heathen god in towering dig-

nity, he glared at Dringall and the full force of his extraordinary personality vibrated in his words.

"I'm fast on a reef, Mr. Dringall," he croaked. "With a smashed propeller and heat in my engine bearings. But I am still Master in this ship and you will do well not to forget that!"

Then he fell over; out like a snuffed candle.

FOR fourteen blessed hours he barely moved, then the fever broke and at last he opened his eyes. With the arrival of full consciousness he glanced at the sea-spattered port light, reached for the push button that called the officer on watch, and sat up.

Dyke Martin answered, opening the door on a howling blast of wind-driven spray. Inside, he clung to the hand grip set in the bulkhead while the *Red Wing* careened and shuddered and a puddle, draining from his storm clothes, clung an instant around the thick soles of his sea boots, then trickled away down the sharply slanting deck.

Broughton looked him up and down with a fishy eye and Martin stood there swaying to the roll and plunge of the ship. Beneath his dripping black sou'-west hat his lean weathered face looked almost delicate and the salt brine standing in drops on his cheeks glistened like tears.

"You're a ringer for your mother, Mr. Angel-face," Broughton growled, jerking his finger toward the photograph above his bunk. "I'll never believe you're a sailor."

"This is a hell of a time to bring that up," Martin snapped.

"That may be," Broughton told him. "But it doesn't change the fact. You're my son and a Mate in my ship and you have the face of a shore-going saint. You're no sailor for me in a tight place."

"You kicked me out twelve years ago when I told you I wanted to go to sea," Martin said bitterly. "You thought you could bend my will to yours. My mother sided with me and you tried to break her, too. Well, I went to sea in spite of you, didn't I?—in a windjammer—took my mother's name. I didn't need either your opinion or your name to get my Mate's ticket and I don't care a damn what kind of a sailor you think I am now. You'd better think about your ship that's being blown up on the Florida coast."

Broughton stiffened at that.

"Where are we?"

"Alligator Reef on the Florida coast showed five miles off, two hours ago."

"Where is the wind?"

"Nor'east."

"The storm center is moving north and west then."

"Yes, sir. The reports are outside."

"I expected this. I told Mr. Dringall to drop the hook at Havana—to wait it out. Instead he has barged into the Straits of Florida; into a forty mile channel between the Florida coast and the worst reef in these waters, Great Bahama Bank. Why didn't you stop him?"

"Stop him! Why should I stop him? Dringall is Chief Officer aboard this hooker." Martin's face darkened angrily. "D'you want mutiny aboard?"

In the gray light from the port, Broughton's face was as bleak and timeless as the hoary gray rocks you see guarding the coast in some places. His voice, always rough, was so harsh it made your blood run cold.

"Mutiny. Aye, that's what it looks like. Rouse out the carpenter, Mister. Tell him to rig a gadget that will hold me and my leg steady in the lee of the wheelhouse. Get the tank tops off, you. Stow them in the 'tween decks. Tell Chief Engineer McKernocht to raise his backside long enough to open the sea valves."

Martin knew right away what his father had in mind but the thing was so bold, and was flung at him so unex-

pectedly that he couldn't get his head around it; and he muttered like a half-wit.

"You mean to let sea water into the holds?"

"Why not?"

"But you can't! The chance—"

"Can't. Can't!" Broughton blazed. "We'll load our holds with sea water and turn her head to the wind and sea. If we can keep her there we'll raise the Bank and then make sternway with the wind pushing us back to the Florida coast. If we try to turn we will get into the trough, capsize and founder with all hands. It's that or be pounded to pieces on the Florida coast. Stop talking, Mister. How are you steering?"

That jerked Martin out of his stupor.

"By standard compass thirty-nine. Our rough course is North by East, the wind is drifting us southwest onto the Florida coast. I have been trying to overcome it—to gain leeway by steering into the wind—eastward, that is, towards the bank."

"With your hull out of water and a whole gale and more pushing against it, same as it was a wall? Don't you know this vessel is four hundred feet long and rises more than thirty feet out of the water? Cripe! The wind against our freeboard is giving us a ten-twenty degree list; and you are trying to gain leeway against the wind. A fine deep water sailor you are."

"The Mate's orders, sir."

"Dringall, eh? I want to see him," Broughton snapped bleakly. "Listen to me, Mister, and no more talk. This vessel has got to set deeper in the water, understand. You get the tank tops off, and tell McKernocht to trim the valves so she fills by the stern. Let him start as soon as your men are clear. You! Put the wheel over so that as she fills and the freeboard lessens she will swing into the wind. Get that carpenter up here, too. Tell the mess-boy to help me with my clothes. Get! Are your feet glued to the deck, man?"

Not many minutes after, Dringall stood dripping on the same puddle Martin's sea boots had made. He looked like a story book sailor; all trigged out in a rakish sou'wester hat turned up at the front, oiled clothes lashed high around his neck, and a rope yarn lashing his coat at the waist. The coat was short, about knee length, and fell over the rubber hip boots he wore. Standing there, he looked quite a Dashing Dick of the Sea except that his face, dripping rain water and brine, was worried and rather nasty looking.

From his bed Old Broughton looked him over coldly while the gale shrieked its urgency, demanding that he come out and fight.

"A fine mess you have put us into, Mr. Dringall," the old man growled at last.

"A question of judgment," Dringall came back at him.

"You call yourself a Master Mariner," Broughton jeered. "You have commanded your own ship. Yet in a pinch you act like a green-horn apprentice."

"I don't have to stand abuse," said Dringall. "I did what I thought was best!"

"Hah!" Broughton cracked bitterly. "You don't have to stand abuse. No! I'll tell you this, Mr. Dringall. You are a sea-lawyer and you think an Admiralty Board would hesitate to suspend a Chief Officer who *might* have been mistaken in his judgment. You say to yourself, 'the orders were not black and white in the book—the Master was sick, delirious, crazy mad.' It's your word against mine that I ordered you into Havana for shelter. That's how it is, Mr. Dringall. Shut up! I have been forty-five years in command of ships. I have never lost a ship. And I will not lose this one. Understand that! I could break you, but I don't have to. You will break yourself. It has already begun and the end is always the same. Your number is up

and you are too big a fool to know it. Get on deck, Mr. Dringall and watch for the white water of Great Bahama Bank."

The mess-boy fell against the door then and Broughton shouted, "Come in." So Dringall slammed out as he had once before, without a word.

A HURRICANE at sea is a wild thing. The wind is so strong it's like an iron hand pushing everything before it. It moans, too. A high pitched moan that sounds like a voice of a bereaved and demented woman moaning in senseless anguish. Above the moan, and cutting in through and under it, are thinner howls and shrieks that vary with every gust—but the moan goes on, inhuman, cold, elemental.

Theoretically a wind like that, ninety to one hundred thirty miles an hour, beats the sea down. But Dyke Martin, drenched with the spray of raking combers that burst with a roar like thunder against his side, didn't think much of the theory that a high wind beats the sea down; nor did Captain Jeremy Broughton when Martin, Norgstrom, the Third Officer, and the mess-boy, tried to make a steady course from his cabin through clashing water a foot deep to the gadget Chips had rigged abaft the protecting corner of the wheelhouse.

A canvas sea bag encased Broughton's leg and an oiled-skin coat was wrapped around that. His small body was lost in the dully glistening folds of the oiled coat, and a sou'wester set far back on his head was strapped tight under his chin. A hatchet faced Buddha he was, in voluminous black garments and a ridiculous hat.

The situation of his ship was enough to make his stout heart quail. On a rough northeasterly course she had the Florida coast to the westward and to the eastward the great coral shelf of Andros Island, known as Great Bahama Bank. The Bank, with a fathom or two of water covering it, shelves from Andros Island and reaches out, a plateau of brittle coral razor backs some twenty miles, where it ends suddenly at the edge of a four hundred fathom "deep." It's forty miles from the edge of the Bank to the Florida beaches and when you have nothing but the usual chop of the Gulf Stream to contend with, it's fair sea-room. But when the wind is off Andros at over a hundred miles an hour, and a ship stands clear of the sea like a huge building laid on edge, it doesn't take long to drift forty miles and end up a tangle of iron plates and machinery on the Florida beach.

Broughton knew this and, perched up there twenty-five feet above the careening deck with the wind whipping and howling and solid walls of briny spray splashing over him, he looked like some sardonic agent of the devil come forth to survey a hell-brew that frothed on the sea-pile foredeck and ran in soiled clots from the beleaguered deck houses.

Beside him, his son Dyke Martin stolidly clung to a jackstay awaiting orders.

Eight bells went, a tingling smear of sound, whipped away in a wink.

Dringall slid across the sharply slanting bridge with a half gesture to his upturned hat.

"Eight bells, Mr. Martin," he shouted, dismissing him. "My watch on deck."

"Stand by the wheel, Mr. Dringall," Broughton commanded, "and when she fills enough for the rudder to take hold sea she is kept steady on her course. Mr. Martin, stay where you are." He waved Dringall away and went back to staring toward the invisible Florida Coast.

Dringall planted himself behind the wheelsman and divided his scowl between the dirty gray scud streaking through the foremast rigging and the card tilting crazily in the binnacle.

Broughton continued his vigil towards Florida to the westward and a half a

dozen times sent Martin through the scream and lash of the gale to check the level of water that was boiling in stout geysers through the sea cocks into the holds. During short lulls in the dinning wind, the slam of seas, and the clank and wheeze of the ship itself, you could catch a new sound, rather thin at first, then deepening, as the free water below, held in check by the compartment bulkheads running athwart the ship, dashed wildly forward, then aft, and the ship, rearing and plunging like a wild thing, gradually sank deeper into the water. By imperceptible degrees, as her free-board narrowed, the wind pressure against her side lessened, and on a more even keel she answered the rudder; sluggishly, swinging her blunt nose into the teeth of the gale.

"Put a look-out on the foremast," Broughton told Martin at last. "And another on the boat deck. It's white water they are to watch for and may God help their souls if they miss it. Look alive, Mister!"

He turned his attention then toward the bared teeth of Great Bahama Bank lying less than forty miles east of him.

TOWARD six o'clock Sparks fought his way forward with a new storm warning that set the deeply scoured lines in Broughton's face a little deeper and made him more than ever a high priest absorbed in a hellish rite.

He crumpled the paper in his fist and stuck it into his pocket.

"Storm center is hauling to the westward," he shouted into Martin's ear. "We will go through the eye of it. Be a good idea if all hands had a shot of grog from my locker."

A few minutes later the storm seemed suddenly to explode around him. The moan went up a note or two and the shrieks and howls reached demoniac proportions. Tons of seething gray water flung into her decks and the wind whipped it shrieking into towering geysers that carried aft over the bridge and stack to fall back hissing into the sea. The ship creaked and groaned and pounded across the bleak combers that grimly strove to roll her on her beam ends.

About three bells the foremast lookout began yelling. It was quite dark by then and the dead cold that runs, like the breath of an underground crypt on a hurricane wind, was colder and deader than ever. The lookout's voice was a thin pipe in the diapason of the gale. All hands strained to see and sure enough, when the spindrift and low flying scud thinned out, there was a light on the bow.

The *Red Wing's* exact position was as much a mystery to her silent, hunched up Master as it was to everyone else. Nobody knew what light it was. But a light was a light and it meant that the Bank was there; a ragged claw reaching out for whatever prey it could find.

All eyes were on Broughton.

The "stand by" was on the engine room telegraph but Broughton went out of his way to send Martin across the careening sea-washed decks to inform McKernocht that the order to reverse would come by way of the "howler" and to stand by for it.

Meanwhile the *Red Wing* shot high on white-crested combers and fell sickeningly away into the rolling, wind-driven trough. From time to time that little prick of light coolly glimmered at Broughton as if mildly interested in the idiotic antics of the half submerged cockleshell that heaved and rolled in the flailing smother of the sea.

Broughton made no move to haul off. He merely stared toward the light as if he were in a trance, or dead, and the deck beneath him surged and fell and seawater charged foaming around his flimsy stand.

The light got bigger and bigger. To some of us it looked round as a life ring.

We knew the shoal was right there under our nose. We thought we heard giant breakers rush across its twenty miles of coral rock. We saw the *Red Wing* thrown up on a saw-toothed razor back. We saw her stranded and broken, going to pieces in the high piling surf. And I suppose we thought Broughton must see that, too; but he just sat there with his face set hard. Only the faint lift of his nostrils marked the presence of life in him.

Hanging to the rail outside the wheelhouse, Dringall licked brine from his pallid lips and hoping for a sign, jerked his head toward Broughton. Norgstrom, on watch now, balanced his big body on wide spread legs and chewed placidly behind the wheelsman's shoulder. Martin, with his jaw a solid jut in the dim half light creeping from the wheelhouse, stood rigid in the flood that washed about his legs. The wheelsman bowed a young face, quite thin and sensitive, in calm profile above the lighted binnacle.

The scene was a dimlit pattern and the silent old man, lashed fast to his jerry-built hospital chair, was the key to it.

The ship banged and clattered groaning down a dizzy slope. She shipped a ton of thundering water over her forecastle head and soared on the heaving breast of a growling black giant while the wind rattled the windows and howled a tremolo in the standing gear.

Of a sudden Broughton slapped Martin.

"Full speed astern," he snapped.

All hands held their breath now.

The *Red Wing* went up, up, up and paused, teetering; then slid careening dizzily, downward. In our minds we saw the jagged coral rock reaching out. Dumbly we felt the *Red Wing* plunge headlong and waited for the shock of the reef coming through. Instead, the plunge slackened and she wallowed heeling drunkenly to starboard. The sea thrust her, sluggishly at first, into a soaring lift. Above the splurging black water we breathed again. The *Red Wing* hung suspended, shuddering slightly, then dived toward the light that hung like an eerie, many ringed bull's-eye in the mist. Down, down—down she went, and our hearts sank with her. An immense sea thumped the bows and tumbled furiously aboard. A wall of water drove straight up the house front as the sea raged full blast across the well-deck and exploded against the superstructure.

Then she was rising again, and the screw taking hold slowly drew her off. A faint cheer drifted up from the men sheltered midship under the boat deck. All hands could feel her ease off now and the enormous eye, winking sardonically beyond the bow, was shrinking and fading into the night.

On the bridge, Dringall passed a palsied hand across his drawn face. Martin cleared his throat harshly and shifted his quid from one side to the other. Norgstrom went on chewing placidly, according to his nature.

Old Man Broughton didn't bat an eye-lash or vary the frozen intensity of his narrow face.

"We'll go half-speed astern, Mr. Martin," he said coldly. "With the wind on our bow we will make sternway enough to work back towards the Florida coast."

Then the tarpaulin on number two hatch let go.

A big sea that was just another rushing threat until it roared into the well-deck with a jar that rattled the deck plates in the fireroom, did the trick. As soon as the water ran off you could hear the pistol-shot snap of the loose tarp out there in the dark.

Broughton's head snapped smoothly around . For an instant he seemed about to fling an order to Martin. Then he shouted above the storm.

"Mr. Dringall! Here! Take some men, Mr. Dringall," he told that officer, "and make fast the hatch coverings and bat-

tens. A life line has been streamed, have your men make fast before going forward."

Those few minutes spent hanging fire off the Bank; and that muddy yellow light suspended like a lamp of doom in the lash and spray and wrangle of the gale had found the soft spot in Dringall. Beneath his turned up hat he was the color of yellow clay and his eyes stuck out with the fear that ate him.

"I'll speak to the Bos'n," Dringall said, putting on a bluff air.

"Wait!" Broughton stared at him, as if he had seen a ghost. Martin laughed flatly, an unpleasant sound that cracked like the loose tarpaulins forward. "Mr. Norgstrom! Here a moment!" Broughton bawled.

Norgstrom ambled to the wheelhouse door looking mild and enquiring. With Martin and Norgstrom listening, Old Man Broughton switched around until he all but faced Dringall directly.

"Go forward, Mr. Dringall, and make fast the hatch coverings," he said as cold as a dill pickle.

Dringall went down then and Broughton waved Norgstrom back to his station by the wheel. Forward in the screaming dark the tarpaulin whacked and snapped; that idiot wind caterwauled; huge seas beat down upon us; and the *Red Wing* struggled drunkenly to hold her own.

Ten minutes or more went by and that infernal tarpaulin still whipped and cracked forward. Then another worked free for we could hear the double snap as the two shredded in the wind. At that rate, it would not be long before the hatch covers washed away, leaving number two hold open to the sea. Old Broughton wasn't one to miss a trick like that even if he did sit there like a graven image.

"Find out what's wrong, Mr. Martin," he said grimly. "And tell me exactly what it is."

"Me?" Martin cried sarcastically.

"Get forward, Mister," Broughton's voice was frigid.

Martin was back in no time.

"It's Mr. Dringall, sir. The men won't go forward without him. It's pretty bad out there—"

"It will be worse if the sea gets in," Broughton snapped.

"What the devil has become of the sailors we used to have? Men! Men! Men! That's what they were. Have Dringall up here, and the bosun, too. Quick!" His gritty voice sounded like so much glass grinding together.

Dringall looked like a sick rat and I guess that is what he was.

"The men—" he began in a thin, whining voice, but Broughton cut him short.

"Did you hear my orders, Mr. Dringall? Go forward and make fast the hatch coverings is what I said. Did you hear that?"

"Yes, sir. I—"

"Why haven't you obeyed me?"

"The men, they—" Dringall waved his hands, a sort of jerky floppy motion that showed he was all jelly inside.

"That's all." Broughton slapped Martin's leg as he had once before. "If you're sailor enough, take those men forward, Mr. Martin." His cold seaman's eyes challenged the weak spot in his son.

"Aye, sir." Martin swung onto the ladder and the boatswain, who had been standing back awaiting the Old Man's call, scuttled down behind him.

Dringall made a vague gesture and waggled his head from side to side. Old Man Broughton waved him away.

"Get inside there where you belong," he croaked. "Mr. Norgstrom! Stand your watch outside here with seamen."

He seemed to forget Dringall then and went back to staring into the dark, though he couldn't see a thing save the hulking shadow of the graybeards charging in on all sides.

Martin went forward, all right. You could hear the men yelling in the mad

blackness of the well-deck. Every few minutes the sea swept in, burying them three or four feet deep in rushing water. But they kept at it and in the end they made all fast and yelled their defiance to the elements when Martin herded them back to safety.

In the murky light coming from the wheelhouse, Old Man Broughton stroked his hand-chopped face and grinned like a gray imp of Hades. But when Martin came back with a smear of blood oozing on his face, Broughton didn't even look at him.

"There are still sailors at sea," Martin shot at him bitterly.

"Hah!" The Old Man yapped once and said nothing more.

A SHRED of dirty light was making the gray scud dirtier when we raised the Florida coast after daybreak. In the dark, we must have drifted southwest onto the coast. It was that, or our dead reckoning was wrong. Either way we saw the flash of a light full on our stern, big as all creation.

Broughton had already headed back toward the Bank when the scud broke for a minute, and there the light was.

Why that little granite gray Captain, who seemed to get smaller and grayer as the hours wore on, ordered full speed ahead and when he did and started plunging away from the Florida beach will always remain a mystery. He couldn't see land and Sparks had long ago reported the Miami and Fort Lauderdale stations silent. Quite suddenly he had banged Martin and shouted calmly even though his tone was harsh.

"Full speed ahead, Mister."

There was something inhuman about Broughton's passionless handling of the whole affair and when just after eight bells of the morning watch we ran right out of that idiot wind into a calm that hit us like a clap of thunder he only cocked a sardonic eye at Martin and in a voice that sounded like two flat sticks brought sharply together, said:

"Aha, the eye."

And we were in the eye of the storm; that fantastic area which is the center of cyclonic storms of this kind.

Here there was no storm at all!

It had a strange effect on me. I could think of nothing but a felon during his brief joy in a last sumptuous meal. I knew perfectly well that this pleasant area of gentle, variable winds was merely a short breathing spell before the gale hit us from another quadrant of the compass.

"Have all hands feed, whatever they can get, and serve out grog all around," Broughton croaked soberly.

It seemed strange to hear a shipmaster in steam harking back to the old windjammer custom of serving a tot of grog to weary sailors. The men fell to with a will and a good thing it was. In less than an hour that God abandoned gale exploded out of the southwest whaling against the marching mountains of the sea, breaking them up, tumbling them seething and boiling one over the other until the whole visible sea was a frothing cauldron and the *Red Wing* looked like a two to one shot for a one way trip to the bottom of the Florida Strait.

Old Man Broughton borrowed a piece of plug tobacco from Martin and gingerly gnawed a small quid from it. From that you can see that even he was worried. But all the sign his granite face gave was a slow chew, chew, chew, that brought a narrow band of muscles out sharply across the upper edge of his jaw bone.

The sea, working up from the southwest, pooped us now and piled seas into the after well-deck while flying wedges of spray swept into the alleyways of the main deck house and flooded the galley until the Filipino cook waded in greasy water to his knees.

With all of this, the breaks were com-

ing our way. Although we were still headed in the general direction of the Bank this new wind tended to drift us along our rough course to the northeast; and since the wind must move around to the south, we should eventually get the sea full astern and make a northerly course for the open water northeast of Great Bahama Island. Some dared to think of this and hope. They looked to Broughton for confirmation—and were disappointed.

He was impassive as before. He sat bolt upright, gave orders to the wheelsman in a scratchy hoarse voice, and looked like a cast-iron lawn ornament.

It was Martin, red-eyed and grim, noticed his father cracking about six hours later when Sparks brought a sketchy bearing that showed we were well north of that devil's hearthstone, Andros Island.

In spite of his saffron skin, Old Man Broughton was gray now, all right, and he gobbled quinine desperately.

When you stop to think of it, he had hauled himself out of a sick bed more than twenty-four hours before and had gone through an experience few sailors are called upon to endure. The wonder is that he had not collapsed long since. But he lasted it out and saw the *Red Wing* beyond the reefs.

For ten more hours Broughton commanded his ship from the bridge and with every hour he shook a little more and loaded up with medicine chest junk, while he fought his way northeastward into open water.

Once the wind began to go, it went rapidly, and at last that moaning agony was over and a fresh gale snored briskly across a world of marching gray-green mountains. A sickly ghost of the sun made a feeble white disc in the high flying storm scud rushing northward.

The radio compass stations were coming in now and our bearings showed that the way lay open and clear ahead and for miles around.

Then and then only did Old Man Broughton allow Martin, with Norgstrom to help, to carry him back to the security of his bunk.

He lay there hot and shaking with his fever ridden gaze fastened on the face of his son. Once or twice he seemed about to speak but some streak of rocky pride clouded his face, pushing his lip forward stubbornly. If Martin, swiftly undressing him, noticed, he gave no sign and went on packing his father, a worn and yellow ghost, among the sheets and blankets. He was about to go on deck when Broughton raised a protesting hand and painfully heaved himself to sitting position. Martin's protests were brushed aside.

"Call the Mate, Mr. Martin," he wheezed.

Dringall came in looking pretty sick.

Broughton's eyes were agoggle with the fever raging through his body.

"You will keep your quarters until we make port, Mr. Dringall," he whispered. "Mr. Martin will command. I'll have you before a Board at Baltimore. That's all."

His eyes wobbled glassily toward Martin and his voice was a whisper.

"You're a dead ringer for your mother," he panted, "a courageous woman." His voice became stronger. "Keep the sea astern, Mister Angel-face. Pump her out when the sea levels off a bit. There is work on deck, see to that," he reached a feeble hand and closed it on Martin's. "You'll make a sailor, Mister."

A foolish grin spread across his face. His eyes were yellow pools with sightless black centers. His head flopped sidewise and he rolled over among the pillows.

Martin tucked him in and set a messboy to watch him. Then he went on deck and you could tell from the jaunty rake of his cap and the tight grin on his face that he was mighty proud.

RED OF THE ARROWHEAD

By GORDON YOUNG

PART FOUR

SYNOPSIS

Red Clark of the Arrowhead was in the Best Bet when Joe Bush, kingpin gambler of Tulluco, hit pretty Sara Timton. A sign above the bar said: "Anybody wearing guns indoors will be arrested." Joe Bush threw a knife and Red shot him dead.

Joe Bush's mother, Mrs. Hepple, ruled the Hepple ranch, rival of the Arrowhead. The Johnsons, father and son, Tulluco bankers, were allied with her. Red's employer, Mrs. George, is a sworn enemy of the Hepples, who had killed her husband.

To avenge Joe Bush's death, three gamblers attack Red. He kills them and a $1,000 reward is put on his head.

At Arrowhead, where rustlers and mortgages and sheepherders harass Mrs. George, her granddaughter, Catharine Pineton, entertains an Easterner, Harold Mason, to whom she is secrety married. Red's friend, old Jeb Grimes, bitter cowhand, watches as gun rule again becomes law at the Arrowhead.

Mrs. Dobbs discovers that the Huskinses, at the suggestion of the Johnsons, are killing her beef. She horsewhips Huskins, defies Sheriff Bill Nims' attempt to arrest Red on a charge of manslaughter. Jim Cross, a ne'er do well rancher

nearby, is found double-branding Arrowhead cattle, aided and abetted by the Hepple outfit and the Johnsons. Red kills Cross.

A visiting stranger called Buck shoots at Red, and thinking that he has killed him, goes to collect the reward.

Meanwhile, Howard Mason admits that he is the son of Mr. Hepple by a former marriage. And Dora Harris, niece of the local judge, admits her engagement to Pinky Hepple. Mrs. George is unaware of these relationships.

Sheepherders, hired by the Johnsons, pasture their despised herds on the Dobbs range. Red and Jeb Grimes drive them off. The Monohela stage, carrying bank money, is held up, and the driver killed.

Red goes to town to warn Judge Harris of Dora's proposed elopement. While he's in Tulluco, the elder Johnson is wounded and Red suspected. Mrs. Dobbs discharges Red and Jeb.

Meanwhile, Buck and his hired killers burn the Dobbs bunkhouses and rob the ranch. Buck plans to carry off Dora, take Harold Mason Hepple and Catharine to the H. P. ranch.

CHAPTER TWELVE

GAMBLING WITH GUNS

IN TRYING to avoid Grimes and Red, Dutchy had fallen with his horse and hurt his bad leg. As he told his story he rubbed at the leg. Red cussed a little, listening. Grimes said not a word; rolled a cigarette and squatted, patient.

Dutchy tried to get up. His fat weight was too much for the injured leg.

"But can you set a saddle if we heave you up?" Red asked. Dutchy, swearing, said he could try. "Then if you go at a walk, maybe you can stick an' get to town."

Red and Grimes lifted, pushed, heaved while Dutchy, bulky and awkward, clawed at the saddle and struggled to climb up. Grunts of pain came out of him.

"We hurtin'?" Red asked.

"Tam der hurt!" said Dutchy. "Ged me ub!" He squealed like a stuck pig but told them to keep on shoving; and so got into the saddle, rubbed his leg, swore.

Red patted Dutchy's good leg. "I never knowed the time would come when I'd admire Dutch bullheadedness so much. Now you take it slow or you'll spill off."

"Whad you feller goin' do?"

"Us? Oh, me an' Jeb'll sorta poke around some an' have a look. That right, Jeb?"

Dutchy rode off into the darkness.

Grimes swung into the saddle, pulled his horse about, not speaking, and headed at a jog trot 'cross country straight as a bee line for Huskinses Place.

A couple of hours later and a mile or two from Huskinses, Red ventured, "Maybe they'll have somebody on guard?"

Grimes said, "Mebbe." Just that, nothing more; and it was the first word he had spoken since they left Dutchy.

They rode on at a quiet trot. Grimes very seldom put a horse into a lope.

After a time Grimes began a circle. Red understood that he was working around so as to come up to the house from the back.

About a half mile off they saw the glimmer of lights in the house. Folks were up. Grimes pulled down to a slow walk so hoof beats wouldn't carry through the night stillness. He drew the rifle from its scabbard, laid the barrel in the crook of his left arm and rode with reins loose, letting the horse pick its way but heading toward the dark blotches that were sheds behind the house.

Red would have preferred to do a little cautious sneaking. This riding up in starlight, slow and casual, was hard

on his nerves. Anybody, or many, could creep out there in the shadows and shoot a couple of times, all of a sudden. But Red would have choked before he let Grimes know how he felt about it. So they went on, stirrup to stirrup, and Red peered tensely at shadows.

Grimes put out his long arm, pulled at Red's reins, stopping. He said in a quiet voice—

"We'll walk from here."

Red got off, shook himself, hitched up his belts, and started to take his rifle, but changed his mind. It would be merely useless weight.

Grimes murmured, "Let's look over their horses first."

He stepped forward with a kind of gliding stride. So far as Red knew, Grimes had been on horseback nearly all his life but he wasn't bow-legged and didn't walk with a wriggle and stumble, and was as erect as if on parade.

They went to the small corral, looked over. Six horses were there, some lying down. They swung their heads, twitched their ears. One got up slowly but stood still. Grimes counted and said, "That's too bad."

Red knew what he meant. Dutchy had reported eight men in the party; and there should have been at least eleven horses here since the two girls and Mason had rode off with them. On top of that, there had probably been some men left here at Huskinses when Buck went to the Arrowhead.

"Now, son," Grimes explained low and easy, "I'll walk around front. You go up the back way here, but wait for me. It is for me to say 'Howdy' first."

Grimes stepped along to the edge of the shed, gave a look toward the house and walked out into the starlight with his rifle in the crook of his arm. He seemed quite consciously to have the feeling that it would be other people's bad luck, not his, if they caught sight of him.

There was a glimmer of light at a dusty window up-stairs, a glow from the front windows down-stairs; none from the kitchen.

Red went in a hurry for the back door. He felt his skin squirm a little at the thought of how anybody standing in the dark kitchen doorway could shoot him down; and he very frankly admitted to himself, humbly, that he didn't have much of what is called cold nerve when put up alongside of old Jeb Grimes. But he had some shame at feeling scairt and it helped to make him go right on, boldly.

The kitchen's outer door was open; the inner closed. A muddle of loud voices came from the front room, with anger in the loudest tones as if a quarrel were on. Red tiptoed quickly across the kitchen and found the door closed but not latched. He pushed cautiously. It was an old heavy hand-made door and swung without a squeak, opening an inch or two.

Red saw a young man half-way up the stairs and over a leveled gun facing those below him. His face was distorted with a determined look, almost frenzied. Red recognized him as young Perry, the bronco buster old Robertson had ordered off the ranch. It sort of made Red mad that an Arrowhead puncher, even if fired not quite justly, should have thrown in with Hepples. But when he heard how Perry talked, Red's feelings changed.

Perry was cussing as he said, "You ain't comin' up! You just ain't! Not while I'm alive, you ain't! I'll kill you if you do an"— He was a little hysterical, but fierce.

Men were talking to him, their eyes on that gun. Three men, one of them old Huskins, were together at the foot of the stairs. They glared, venturing a foot on the lowest step.

Two other men were sprawled in chairs, looking on as if at a show and with a kind of evil amusement taunting the fellows Perry had stopped. One of the on-lookers was a pot-bellied man with a flat moon-like face. He had a sneer

sort of grin and jeered, "You all look handsome, but I must say, lettin' that kid stop you—after you won 'er!" The other, a wrinkled, starved looking old man, showed broken teeth and tobacco-slobbered mouth in grinning: "He's jes' tryin' to save 'er for himself!" The lean old starved fellow had his arm on the table and a pack of cards in his hand.

Huskins, with some rags tied around his leg where the dog had bit him, stomped about and bellered, "We'll kill you, kid! We won 'er fair an' square—an' playin' poker was yore own notion!"

A bareheaded wild looking young fellow was yelling, "We ain't scairt! It's only we don't want to hurt you!"

Another man had one foot on the lowest step and kept pretending that he was about to rush, but talked, saying, "Don't be a fool, kid!"

Perry kept right on saying, "You ain't comin' up! You just ain't!"

" 'Twas you,' Huskins bellered some more, "said let's play poker for 'er an' now cause you lost—"

"Ol' Pap there he won 'er!" said the pot-bellied man, amused. Then the pot-bellied man straightened a little in his chair, let his hand fall to his side, shouted in a kind of boisterous good humor, "I'll show you how!" He had drawn his gun unnoticed and as he spoke he shot from the side of the chair, "Now," he yelled, "go git 'er!"

Perry, hit in the breast, pitched forward headlong down the stairs. His cocked revolver fell from his hand and the jar of the fall let the hammer strike. It exploded harmlessly on the floor but made men jump. A woman screamed as Perry plunged down, flopping with a wild swing of legs to the bottom of the stairs. The men there stumbled back as if from blows.

Red's glance went high up the stairs. Catherine's blanched face peered down with look of terror.

Red kicked the heavy door wide and lurched forward. He said, "Damn your souls!" and was shooting before the words were out of his mouth. The first bullet went into the moon-faced man's pot-belly; and, as he sprang up, really falling, but very much as if to rush, Red shot him again.

There were squeaks and yaps of surprise, blurted oaths. Huskins howled, "Oh, that Red!" The old skinny man scattered the pack of cards in a convulsive toss of hand as he sprang up, knocking over the chair behind him. He drew and shot quick, and without looking around swung his left arm at the lamp on the table behind him. The swing missed and Red shot him. The lean, withered old fellow went down, shooting. His mouth was wide open as if to bite poisonously with blackened tooth stumps.

There was blaze of guns. Flame tips jabbed at Red. Smoke boiled explosively above gun muzzles. Red jumped to one side, getting his back to the wall. He shot as a fighter uses his fists, all instinct and fast. Bullets splattered the wood behind his head.

The black-headed wild looking young fellow crouched as he backed off with two guns out and both blazing, then pitched forward, hit in the heart. Red's mouth was half open, his lips drawn back. The look of an unconscious grin, savage and joyful, was on his face, but his eyes had a hawk-fierce glare. Huskins stumbled to take cover at the side of the stairs, drew awkwardly at his revolver. His first shot, over-anxious, hit the floor not far from his own feet; his second went off at the ceiling as he fell with the top of his head blown off. Red, with a snap shot through the two-inch space between the bannister supports, hit him high on the forehead.

Red's hat jumped as if snatched and as it went he jerked his head to one side, instinctively as a fighter dodges. A bullet smashed the wood where his head had been and there was a kind of fren-

zied petulence in the cry of the lean withered old fellow: "Why can't I hit the—" He was on the floor, half under the table, dying but still murderous. He gripped a rung of the overturned chair with his left hand, rested the revolver on his wrist, squirmed flat, drawing a bead.

Catherine shrieked, "Look out!"

A RIFLE roared through the open front doorway. The old withered fellow simply flattened out still more, face down. His grip on the chair's rung loosened. The gun slipped from his fingers, turned on its side, lay cocked with its muzzle on his left wrist.

Grimes stood in the doorway with smoking rifle waist high and looked about. His eyes were a little narrower, their look more of a gleam than usual, but otherwise he might have been coming in from a rabbit hunt to sit down to dinner. He stepped in, moved through the smoke haze, stood before Red, and his glance went up and down, seeing if Red were hurt.

Red waggled his guns, grinned nervous and gulped a deep breath:

"A-whew, but it was nice to see you! These here are empty!"

"Son," said Grimes calmly, "you done good." Then, with reproach, "But why didn't you wait like I said?"

Red pointed. "There is why!"

Catherine was coming down the stairs a slow step at a time with trance-like movement. Her hand slid along the rail as if fearful of letting go.

"Why you here alone?" Red asked.

She didn't answer, but moved slowly and trembled a little. Her pretty face looked as if it were frozen in a dazed stare. "Perry?" she mumbled.

"He's dead, I'm purt-near sure," Red told her, trying to sound gentle. "When they fall like that—" He went to the foot of the stairs, knelt. Still kneeling, he looked up, nodded.

Catherine came on down the stairs, closed her eyes, reached out, took hold of Grimes. He steadied her to a chair. She leaned forward with forearm against her face, over her eyes. In a moment or two the forearm dropped as if she hadn't the strength to hold it up. She straightened wearily, muttered, "Terrible," and looked blankly toward Perry's body.

"Where's Buck and them?" Red asked.

Catherine swung a listless hand. The hand dropped as if it were too much effort to point. "He heard me ask Dora to coax him to let me and Hal go. So he left me here alone. Alone with those awful men. I could hear them talking. Perry—Perry made them play poker for me. For hours and hours, then— Oh, why did he have to be killed after being brave and honorable!"

"He was a nice boy, Miss Kate. But he made a big mistake in talkin' to them kind of fellers 'stead of shootin'!"

She didn't appear to be listening, but sighed and brooded. When Red asked, "Where'd Buck and them go?" she answered in a dazed voice, "To the Hepple ranch. He said—said I'd never see Hal again."

Red looked expectantly at Grimes. Grimes nodded slightly. The glance had asked, "Do we take out after them fellows?" and the nod said, "We do!"

"Miss Kate," Red explained, "I'm sorry, but me and Jeb has got to be ridin'. We'll put you on a horse an' you can light out for town. 'Tain't far. Miz George is there. You'll be took good care of."

Catherine stared at him. "You are going— Where?"

"We sorta have to have a little word with that Buck feller. He's got some wrong notions as need tendin' to."

"You are going to follow him?"

"Kinda, a little."

Her eyes cleared, brightened. "I am going with you!"

"Oh, no, you aint!"

"I am going to follow my husband! I would follow him to the ends of the earth!"

"I bet. But you don't ride good an' we'll—"

"I can hold on!"

"You'll be jolted an' awful wore out."

"You can tie me on! That is what they did to poor Hal!'

"No'm."

"I promise there won't be a whimper out of me."

"We ain't goin' to take no girl, Miss Kate!"

"If you don't take me, I'll follow! I will go!"

"You can't keep up and you'll get lost, sure."

"Very well then, I shall get lost!"

Red looked appealingly toward Grimes; but Grimes was aloof and his dark-lined face as expressionless as a mask.

"Now, Miss Kate, please. 'You can't stand hard ridin' like we'll—"

"I will stand it!" For an instant her look and her tone were very like Mrs. George. "Hal is brave. I am proud of him! He tried to fight for me. And he is to be more admired because he tried when he was weak and helpless against that big murderous brute! I am going to him if I have to walk!"

Red swore. He used highly colored oaths, helplessly. "You just can't and ain't!"

"I just will!"

"Listen here." There was a rough snap in his voice. "Much as I like you, Miss Kate, I ain't goin' to ride slow on your account. And you know damn well you can't keep up with us. So do you wanta do somethin' that'll maybe keep us from catchin' 'em? We are goin' to wherever the hell them fellers are because they got to be learnt they can't make trouble for Miz George and not wish they hadn't!"

Catherine's pale tired face had an expression of petulant anger but she did not say anything. There was fierceness in the way he had spoken. She moved a hand, pushing the loosened hair that hung about her face, and still looked determined; but she said, weak and slow, "Perhaps you are right."

Dawn had come. The lamp was burning on the table but its wick was now just a tiny flame that seemed to give no light. The windows and doorway were grayishly transparent with the cold glow of early morning.

Grimes went out to feed their horses and saddle up for her. Red walked over to Perry's body, straightened his arms, put his feet together, unbound Perry's neckerchief and laid it over his face. Catherine sat dully staring toward Perry.

Red prowled about and found grub. He brought some crackers, cheese and a dish of cold beans and offered them to Catherine. She shuddered, glanced up reproachful, looked away.

"I couldn't."

He leaned against the wall and began to eat, just chewed and chewed and chewed on the dry food with a preoccupied air. He swallowed two or three times, cleared his throat:

"When you see Miz George, tell her for me I don't have to have wages to ride for the Arrowhead as long as they is trouble. Jeb, he is the same. Tell her, too, I never shot old Johnson—but I sure as hell am goin' to, next chance I get!"

He started to take a bite of cheese, stopped:

"Tell her Jim of the Best Bet can explain why I went to see Sara and 'Gene shot 'er tryin' to shoot me. She jumped right square plumb out in front of me."

Red examined his hunk of cheese as if studying where next to take a bite, raised it to his mouth, had another thought:

"Tell 'er, too, as how she'd better tell folks in Tulluco to wait till I've settled with this Buck before they crowd up on me tryin' to collect a thousand dollars.

After that they can play hide and seek with me and most liable not be bad hurt."

He stuffed cheese into his mouth with one hand, crackers with the other, and chewed and chewed, still preoccupied with thoughts. Soon he swallowed some more, then spoke again, serious:

"Your husband is a right good feller from how Dutchy talked. Nobody as I ever heard tell ever called old Dingley Hepple a coward and his boy takes after him, some. But you want to stand off quite a piece when you tell Miz George you two are married. Then you'd better back off some more before sayin' he is a Hepple. She'll go right up like a scairt bronc an' come down stiff-legged in a way to jar your back teeth. And that's a fact!"

Grimes picked what looked like a gentle horse, saddled it, mounted and shook the horse up with a few pokes of the spurs. The horse didn't pitch, so he rode around front. Red went to the door, stuffing the last of the cheese into his mouth. He turned to Catherine, beckoned, said:

"A'right. You'd better be makin' a start."

She got up, dead tired and weak. Grimes and Red both gave her a hand up into the saddle. She pushed at her skirts, tucking them in under her legs more as a gesture than really caring.

"You know, I been thinkin'," said Red. "Dutchy will have got to town purt-near by now or before. Miz George an' them will be right along out, quick. You may meet 'em on the way. Don't tell *nobody* me an' Jeb is headed for the Hepple ranch, 'cause then folks'll know where to look for me and try to get that thousand dollars."

Catherine looked down at Grimes, who stood tall and calm. She looked at Red, again at Grimes. She spoke to both.

"Promise me you will kill that man Buck? Promise?"

Grimes merely nodded slightly with bare drop of eyelids.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE RECKONING

GRIMES and Red switched their saddles to horses in the corral that were branded H P and rode, leading their own. As soon as they were warmed up, Red was eager to gallop some but Grimes believed the trot the fastest way to cover long distance. A horse, he would say, couldn't gallop in a day farther than a man could walk; but no man could walk in a day as far as a horse could trot.

They took the old road toward Monohela which led near the Hepple place forty miles south. Red tried to talk but Grimes had nothing to say; so Red shut up and wished he could sleep, but he couldn't at a trot. He tried singing, but it didn't go well, so he shut up and played like he, too, was a sour old-timer.

A little before eight they came upon a covered wagon by the roadside. The man was breaking camp, just hitching up. He looked pretty much like a sleepyhead. A dirty yellow dog with ragged ears lay under the wagon. A woman with two small children about her skirts was putting things in over the end gate. The wagon was pointed south. Both were tired shiftless-looking folks and stared at the cowmen.

The man said, "Howdy," not cheerfully.

Grimes reined up. "Howdy." He looked at the man a moment or two, then inquired in a soft voice, "Camp here the night?"

"Shore."

"Did you folks see some men ride by, a woman with 'em?"

The woman came forward with a rush, overturning one of her children. It got up stoically and teetered after its mother. She was saying breathlessly:

"An' that woman was a-cryin' like all get out! Pepper growled 'long about midnight. We keep 'im tied up on account of coyotes. When he growled I raised up an' listened. I heard hosses comin'. I nudged Bud but he was all wore out an' sleeps like a log. But I raised up an' peeked over the side board. They was ridin' all strung out. Six 'r seven men an' a woman. She was cryin' somepin turrible. A feller he was a-swearin' at 'er! It made me hoppin' mad but I couldn't do nuthin'. Who was they, mister? I've wondered powerful!"

Grimes said, "Thanks, lady," and started on.

Red paused with, "They stole that girl!"

The woman gasped, "Oh, great God A'mighty!" Bud dropped his jaw, almost letting his tongue hang out.

"I hope you boys git 'em!" the woman screamed. Then, "But they's only two o' you!"

Red waggled his hand at Grimes who was riding on, and he grinned a little as he bent in the saddle, sort of confidential: "You ain't guessed right a-tall. There goes a half dozen all by hisself!"

Red fidgeted at the trot but kept his mouth shut. Grimes knew best. On they went with faint jingle-jingle of spurs, squeak of leather, steady beat of hoofs, mile after mile. They met men and passed under staring eyes. Grimes, tall and straight and stern, looked like somebody. One glance and people knew that he was a range-bred fighting man; and when they said, "Howdy," Grimes gave a look, raised his hand a little in acknowledgment, said nothing and rode on.

About noon they stopped, changed horses, turning loose the Hepples to wander home or to be stolen. Red was glad to be free of a lead rope. He stroked the still bluish Ghost's neck. "You still look sorta sin-tainted, Spook. Come on, now. Show that barrel-bellied lop-eared ewe-neck Jeb's settin' on how to trot!"

The Ghost was fast and strong, but Red had been wilfully insulting. Grimes' horse was ewe-necked, but barrel-chested, lean of belly, tireless.

Red turned a lot of remarks over in his mind and at last selected one as likely the best to get a reply. "Your idee, Jeb, maybe is not to get in much before dark, hm? Sorta be able to ride up close before them folks find out we ain't Hepples ourselves, hm?"

"Live an' learn," said Grimes.

Along toward the middle of the afternoon they saw, far off the road, what looked in the distance like smoke. Grimes jogged 'cross country straight for it.

A small herd was on the trail.

They reined up on high ground and eyed the herd. Looked mighty like the Hepples were sending cows into the Basin. Red guessed there were about five or six hundred and counted five horsemen.

The Hepples naturally didn't expect any trouble on the trail; thought they had already seized and were holding Huskinses' Place, the key to the Basin. These cows were being moved about as casually as a beef cut on the way to market.

Grimes rode forward, trotting, with Red 'longside. Three men came along up to meet them, no doubt thinking they were Hepples, perhaps bringing word of some kind. When they saw the Arrowhead brand they reined up stiffly, backed their horses a little, separating so as not to be bunched if a fight started.

Grimes rode right on up to almost within arm's reach of the nearest man and looked all three over with a quick glance. Red sized them up as just punchers, the sort he had rode with, bunked with, scuffled with, nearly all his life. Would have maybe been all right fellows except for the Hepple brand on their horses.

"Who's trail boss?" Grimes asked, soft and clear, eying a bronzed young fellow.

"Me," said the bronzed young fellow,

setting his jaw. He didn't mean to stand any sass from Dobbses.

Grimes eyed him quite a long while, then bubble-soft, asked:

"You maybe are drawin' wages to fight Dobbses?"

The trail boss looked like a pretty good man and, as trail bosses are supposed to have, had some sense. He said,

"We are drawin' wages to ride for the H P, take care of Hepple stock an' do as told. Right now, orders they is to take these cows into the Basin, the which is bein' done."

"My name it is Jeb Grimes. The Basin it is Arrowhead range."

That wasn't much to say but it meant a lot. The trail boss knew about Jeb Grimes, and knew that Grimes had said, "If you still have got any notions about pushing these cows on into the Basin there is going to be a fight, here and now."

The trail boss spoke soft. "All I know is that my orders is—"

Grimes said, "Jest a minute till I say somethin' more." His voice was cool and soft as a little brook running over pebbles. "Some folks from yore ranch 'peared to be followin' orders yestidy when they rode in on the Dobbses, knowin' scas'ly nobody was to home. They killed the foreman. They killed a cowboy. They burnt corrals and bunkhouse. They stole some hosses. They carried off a couple of women."

"God A'mighty," said the trail boss.

"Me an' this kid here," Grimes went on, "is down here lookin' for the rest of them we didn't catch up with last night over to Huskinses' Place."

The two punchers with the trail boss spoke up. One said, "We never heard!" The other said, "Women?"

Grimes went on eying the trail boss. "I have made you quite some speech. Now, do you turn that herd an' head back south, or do you want me to do it for you? Speak yore piece!"

That was that and plain as the spot on an ace-card. They all knew Jeb Grimes by name, knew him better by the look in his eyes, the softness in his voice. What Red knew and they didn't was that Grimes had sized them up as honest looking punchers who were drawing wages for just cow-work, and he had given them a choice. They could fight or back down.

The trail boss showed some color under his bronze. He didn't want to back down and maybe be jeered later on by men who most likely would have turned tail and bolted if Jeb Grimes merely leaned forward and spit at them. The trail boss was studying some when one of his boys spoke up:

"Women? You say them fellers carried off some women?"

"I said it."

"That feller Buck an' them?" asked the other boy.

"Them."

"Who was the women?"

"One was Miz Dobbs' gran'daughter. Other, some relation of Jedge Harris there in town."

"An' burnt the ranch?"

"Bunkhouse an' corrals."

"Me," said the youngest puncher, "I ain't goin' to uphold no doin's like that! An' I didn't like the look, nohow, of them men Buck brung."

"Me neither," said the other.

The trail boss asked, "What happened to them you fellers caught up with?"

"They are dead. This kid here, shot 'em. His name it is Red Clark."

Red felt a little embarrassed and a little pleased, too. He tried not to grin and he didn't want to set sober and stern like he thought himself a bad man, so he began to roll a cigarette as if he didn't hear well and hadn't took notice.

They all stared at him, hard. His name was known; and the reward for him, too. It was some surprise to see that Red was just a kid, like most any young puncher, without more trappings and fixin's than two heavy guns; and that

he didn't stare like he was trying to scare somebody.

The trail boss said to his men, "Boys, it shore does go against the grain to be told by a rival outfit what to do with our cows. When I draw wages, I foller orders. But me, I won't back up no bunch from any man's outfit as steals women."

Grimes nodded, turned his horse a little to ride by them, lifted his hand in grave slight gesture of parting and went on at the trot with Red at his stirrup. Neither looked back.

As soon as they were well away from the herd, Grimes touched his horse into a lope, a hard one; and as the gallop kept up, Red, pleased, nevertheless jeered, "Here me, I was allus taught to think a feller went faster—trottin'!"

"We got to git there first, son. One of them boys may try to ride ahead an' say we are a-comin'!"

THE HEPPLE ranch house lay ahead in the twilight. It was a sprawling squat adobe, roughly built with deep-set narrow windows. A few old cotton-woods rose scraggly and wide-reaching close up to the house. They were said to have rooted from green corral posts, hauled in and put down in the early days when old Hepple was a young man, unmarried, and he had his corral right up close to where he slept on account of Indians.

Grimes rose in the saddle, stretched his neck far, peering. Red too stretched his neck and made out a bunch of eight or nine saddle horses standing near the front of the house.

" 'Pears to be quite some folks about, Jeb?"

"Son," said Grimes, mild, "you have got perception aplenty!"

He pulled his horse down and again jogged on just as if riding into a friendly place, except that the rifle came from the scabbard and lay in the crook of his left arm. Red felt of first one revolver, then the other, loosening them in the holsters so they would come smooth.

He could see, or thought he could, a dim shadow or two move between the trees. No use in saying something about that. If there were any movement, Grimes' hawk-keen eyes would have seen; if not, Grimes might get the notion that Red was skittish a little. So he kept stirrup to stirrup with Grimes and said nothing.

When they were within something around a hundred yards of the house a man stepped into view with a rifle in his hands. His voice was sort of insolent and sure, as if it were a good joke to have these two punchers—he must have though they were Hepples, just coming along in to the home ranch—ride into a trap.

"Pile off an'—"

That was as far as he got. Grimes simply twitched his horse with knee pressure a little to one side, and shot. It looked as if he didn't take aim at all. That was the only way Grimes would parley with fellows who had done so much of what wasn't right.

The man went into the air like a buck that is shot just as it jumps, flung the rifle and sprawled out as if he had been thrown.

The instant he shot Grimes had yelled cheerfully, "Come on, son!" He drove in the spurs and rode straight for the trees, shooting as he went. He let out a yell that was like—that was!—an Apache war shriek. His horse thundered forward with furious bound on bound.

Red rode after him, plumb dead sure that if Grimes had stayed up a week of nights, thinking hard, he couldn't have thought up anything foolisher than to charge at a 'dobe house when some bad men were in it. But the range code Red had lived by ever since he could toddle away from a cradle said that you had to stay with a friend, damn fool or not, when he headed for trouble. So Red sort of braced himself for the shock of the

bullet that would knock him out of the saddle, drew a revolver, rode headlong, and shot a time or two just to be taking part in the goin's on.

But Grimes' damn foolishness somehow always had some bold common-sense back of it. Now, headlong and whooping like mad, he rode down on that bunch of saddled horses, jerked off his hat, flapped, struck, yelled, stampeding them. One horse that hadn't been trusted with "ground hitching" was tied to a tree. Grimes drew a revolver and shot the horse as it plunged, rearing, to follow the others that had been left with reins trailing.

The bad men might be behind 'dobe walls, but they were on foot. They would have to stand and fight. They couldn't rush out, hit leather and ride.

There was a rapid popping of revolvers, and angered yells shrill with surprise, as men from within the house rushed through the doorway to see what was going on.

The horses had been turned and Red was on their tails, driving them hard, making them snap their trailing reins under their feet as they ran. The firing behind was so hot that Red flung his head about to have a look. He saw Grimes' horse, with empty saddle, plunging off in a wide circle after the other horses.

"They've downed old Jeb!"

Grimes was flat on the ground at the edge of the cottonwoods, right up within easy stone's throw of the house; but his rifle was going off with a kind of rapid regularity as if he counted between shots. Shadows were leaping with a kind of frantic waver about the lighted doorway. There was a lance-like flash of guns, much mad yelling and some of it sounded a little scairt. At such close quarters, even in the dark, and even if himself bad hurt, Grimes could purt-near shoot off a man's nose.

In no time at all, Buck and such of his men as hadn't already been dropped, had enough of trying to shoot it out with Grimes at close quarters. They went hopping into the house and slammed the door to. Now if they wanted to get away without fighting they would have to sneak out back and cut cross country on foot, which to high-heeled horsemen would be about like walking barefoot over hot cinders.

Red pulled up with jerk on jerk of reins. He figured Grimes had been knocked out of the saddle and lay there making it a fight. He had driven the fellows into the house and they were some cautions about making a noise even now because the flash of guns showed Grimes where to shoot.

But it seemed to Red that Grimes was in an awful bad hole. Those fellows might sneak out, circle, get at him from the back and sides, many shooting at once—that is, if there were many left.

Red didn't do much thinking. In a jiffy-flash he swung loose his rope, jumped off, put a noose over The Ghost's head, tied the end to some sage, whipped out his rifle and started back toward the trees so he could squirm to where Jeb was, get down alongside and help him argy.

Red ran low and went zig-zag. A gun flashed at him from a dark window. The bullet went high. On the instant there was a second shot and a howl. Old Grimes, wary and watchful, had shot on the instant at the flash in the window.

Red, even if anxious and tense, couldn't help grinning some as he thought those fellows in the house probably knew by now that they had been monkeying with somebody a lot more dangerous than themselves. Red worked his way cautiously from one splotch of sage or cactus to another. He thought it would be pretty bad if he got crippled and old Grimes was crippled, too.

He angled over to line up the cottonwoods between him and the house and crept along. Somebody from a far corner of the house took another shot at

him. The bullet splattered dirt about Red's foot and Grimes answered it with the promptness of an echo.

Following that, suddenly as if a plan had been figured out by Buck's men, there was a burst of rapid fire from a window and now darkened doorway. It looked like the fellows that were left were trying to swamp Grimes with lead. And Grimes' rifle did not answer.

Red had the ghastly feeling that one of the bullets must have clipped Grimes through the head. Red swung belly-down on the ground. The trees were a little in his way, but he put some shots through the air just to let the fellows know that he, at least, was still in the fight. The trees were even more in the way of the men who were shooting back at him because he was nearer the trees. Then the fellow up at the corner of the house broke cover to make a run forward and get behind a tree himself. Red could see the shadow detach itself from the solid blackness of the house and with a blurr of scurrying cross a starlit patch. Red shot twice, fast. Then Grimes' rifle banged. The old plainsman had been playing possum. The scurrying shadow straightened, tottered, fell, stirred on the ground as if trying to crawl, then lay still.

A fellow within the house yelled in angered shocked scairt tone: "They got Body!" and his voice ended in a kind of nervous whoop as Grimes shot at the window through which the voice came.

Red could hear some angry cussin' in a frustrated tone going on in the house. It sounded to him like Buck's voice. He was cussin' his luck. It was sure bad. Red felt like yelling at him, sarcastic and jeering; but he didn't. He scrouged slow and cautious up to a tree trunk not fifty feet from where Grimes was and called softly, "You hurt, Jeb?"

"Bad hurt," said Grimes. "They busted my leg an' I been hit twict more."

"Gosh a'mighty! Jeb?"

Grimes answered, full of pain, "I'm purt-near done f'r, son. You'd better back off an' light out!"

"Yeah," Red growled, "when hell's snow-bound I will, maybe!"

"I'm all sick an' dizzy," said Grimes, and groaned.

Buck, listening, heard that too. He yelled, savage, "They's only one left out there!" as if the one would be easy to take care of.

It made Red mad and he shot pretty fast, just sort of making a noise to let Buck know this fight wasn't over yet, not by a whole lot.

Red stopped shooting and began to crawl over to Grimes. Buck and the fellow or two left with him were quiet, too, as if putting their heads together for a plan to get at Red. It was so quiet that Red could hear a woman crying. Buck swore irritably at her, "Aw shut that bellerin'!"

Red squirmed over to almost arm's reach of where Grimes lay all spraddled out, hugging the ground, almost as flat as if dead; but his gun was up on a bent elbow for a rest and his head was cocked as alert as a rattler's in a coil. He was in the deep shadow of the trees so there wasn't much of anything that could be seen of him from the house.

Red peered close, tensely anxious, then gurgled in a joyous whisper, "You damn old hypercritter, you! Ain't you shamed to lie like that to some bad-worried bad men!"

GRIMES hadn't been hit at all. He had simply thrown himself out of the saddle and rolled over behind a tree so as to be right up close to the house. It was his way of showing contempt for this bunch of bad men that had rode in on Mrs. George's place, shot her dogs and men, burned her ranch houses and carried off women. His notion of making a fight was always to let other folks shoot at him just about as much as they liked as

long as it gave him a good chance to shoot at them.

Now Grimes didn't make a move or say a word, just moaned a little, low and hurt, as if he couldn't help it and all the while lay there watchful and ready.

Everything was pretty quiet for a time except that the woman in the house was still crying, and the cottonwoods rustled their leaves as if they were a little nervous over all this shooting. The stars were bright and it was a soft cool evening.

Red sprawled out, too, trying to be ready and watched at the corners of the house, with rifle poised. But his elbows got tired, his neck felt strained as if ready to break. He had to move his legs a little, easing muscles. Old Grimes didn't stir. He was steady as a log, patient as an Indian.

There was a sudden racket in the house. Guns went off together in the house as if folks were shooting at each other there. There were the screams of more than one woman, some yells and blurted cuss words. It sounded like a lot of people were badly scared and some were being hurt.

Red cocked his ears with—

"Now what the hell?"

But Grimes, who could think quicker than most people could wink, was on his feet and running forward. "Come on, son!"

Red jerked himself into a scrambling lurch, dropped his rifle, taking a revolver in each hand. He understood all in a flash that Grimes had figured that with so much racket and commotion stirred up in the house, Buck and whoever else was left with him would be too busy for a moment or two to be watching close.

It was a hundred feet or so from where they had been lying to the house; and it seemed to Red a mile. His legs were working fast but felt as if they were dragging. He ran clumsily, trying to keep on his toes, but his long dime-pointed heels hit the ground and the jingle of his spurs sounded to him like bells that rang an alarm. All that anybody there in the house had to do was poke a gun through a window and shoot fast.

The heavy front door that Grimes had splattered with lead was half open. Grimes did not pause. His rifle was pointed forward as if he had a bayonet on it. He struck the door with his shoulder and went through. It was almost dead dark with a dim hazy glow coming from the doorway of a room far down near the end of the hall.

As he passed a side door a gun from within the unlighted room flashed at Grimes. He wheeled, stepped into the doorway, faced the darkness and with rifle butt at his hip shot instantly at what seemed the stir of a darker splotch of black in the unlighted room. There was a muffled grunt, a soft sliding sound, the clattering bump of something like a revolver.

"Got 'im," said Grimes, soft and cool, as if he had shot a bobcat outside Mrs. George's chicken pen.

Red, with both revolvers out, was crouched alongside of Grimes and peering tensely for the movement of any other dark splotches in the room when he heard a woman's sobbing scream, partly a cry for help, partly a wild shriek of warning there in the hall. Red, looking another way and crouched in an awkward position to whirl quickly, gave a lurching stumble as he turned with startled jerk of body. A flame-tipped streak flashed at him from the end of the hall.

Red, off balance and stumbling, nevertheless shot instinctively with arm outflung, but even as the hammer was falling he wrenched his arm back to pull off, miss, shoot wild, for there, silhouetted in the dim glow at the end of the hall, he saw that he was shooting at what looked merely like the distorted figure of a woman. There was a woman's long skirts and head, with hair wildly disheveled.

One hand was out in a frantic reaching as if for something, anything, to grasp; but—such was the instant's blurred grotesque impression—the other arm and hand seemed a man's and held a revolver. Also a man's hat appeared just above the woman's shoulder and was partly concealed by her neck. The woman screamed wildly.

It was Dora. Buck held her tightly before him, hiding behind her. She struggled crazily, fear-crazed; but had scarcely more force against his strength than a fluttering canary in a cat's mouth; yet her helpless hysterical struggling jarred Buck's arm as he fired again and again, rapidly.

Bullets slapped the wall beside Red, but he stood with the look of a man who could not move. He could, and knew he could, have shot fast and not missed once in twenty times the mark that Buck's face made above her shoulder; but in that vague light, and while Dora writhed and tossed her head this way and that, Red simply felt paralyzed. He did not dare shoot. All of which Buck had counted on, craftily.

But Grimes stepped from the doorway, turning. He frowned for an instant in peering to figure out what a woman was doing there; then, apparently without aim, shot. The bullet took a hole right out of the crown of Buck's hat. The roar of the rifle between the walls of the hallway was instantly followed by another. Woman or no woman, Grimes was going to shoot it out then and there; but Buck jumped sideways, whisking Dora with him, and vanished into the dimly lighted room.

There was a moment's hush after the noise of the guns; silence except for the quick clatter of Buck's sharp-pointed heels and scraping click of spurs as if, burdened with weight, he ran unsteadily, and the vague loudness of his baffled oaths. There was no other sound throughout the house. Dora's voice was stilled as if she had fainted, or been killed.

Grimes, wary, unhurried but not in anyway hesitating, walked along the hall and paused in the dimly lighted wide doorway that opened into the dining room. The floor of the dining room was two steps down from the level of the hall.

The lamp on the dining room table had been turned low. The smell of powder smoke was strong in the room. Some of the recent shooting had been in there.

A man yelled from across the huge room at Grimes—

"He's hid in that closet! Look out!"

Another man's voice shouted, "Drug the girl in with him!"

Then a woman, amazed and shrill, cried out, "Who are you fellows?" It sounded a little as if she somehow didn't like what was happening.

Grimes did not answer, so there was some more silence. The smoke shifted, thinned, rose; and Red's eyes began to get used to the dim light. Grimes held his rifle waist high and pointed toward the door of the closet where Buck had holed up.

Red went across to the table and turned up the lamp. It had been dimmed so the fellows who moved about in the room wouldn't cast shadows for Grimes to shoot at through the window. The tables was set for supper and there were two lamps on it, but one had been blown out. The lamp Red turned up did not fill the room with light. He lighted the other.

"Gosh a'mighty!" Red mumbled sort of sucking in his breath as he made out four or five people tied up on the floor, backed up against the wall; but Mrs. Hepple was tied fast in a rocking chair.

Out away from the wall were two men on the floor that looked dead. One, all huddled up with face down and knees drawn up, was Hal Mason.

Red blurted, "What the gosh-blamed hell's been a-happenin'?" His voice sounded loud and almost as if he had said something he hadn't ought've. There was so much hush and staring from the

people who were tied up; and nobody said a word for a moment or two.

Then one of the cowboys that had their hands behind them and ropes about their legs and waists—the same who had called to Grimes to look out, that Buck was in the closet—said, "Good for you fellers!"

And the other said, "F'r God's sake let us loose so we can help do somethin' to that—" His cuss words decorated Buck's name with a lot of feeling.

A fat Mexican woman lay on the floor, tied up, and also a Chinaman in a blue blouse and black pants. Mrs. Hepple called, "Oh Red! It is you! I am *so* glad. Let me loose, please." Her tone coaxed, not very pleasantly, and she was eying him with black-eyed stare, but seemed to convey that she liked Red fine, just as though he hadn't shot her gambler-son and she, in turn, hadn't most likely helped put Buck up to try to murder him. The Mexican woman had a black-eyed stare, too; but it was fixed on Mrs. Hepple and looked just about as if there were a mask over her heavy face and the eyes peered hot and angered from behind that mask.

The Chinaman seemed too scared to wiggle.

Grimes called cool and soft-voiced, "Turn them boys loose, Red, but not that woman!"

Mrs. Hepple knew that he meant her and not the Mexican woman. She rocked back in a kind of surprise and her black eyes lighted with a flare of temper. The more she stared at Grimes the queerer the look got on her face. Her eyes popped and stretched almost saucer-size and her mouth opened like she was trying to yell and couldn't. Then she said, sort of hushed and scairt, "*You!*" It was plain enough that she recognized Grimes as somebody she had never wanted to see again, but he didn't even look toward her.

Buck, through the heavy door of the closet, had come to life and was trying to talk. He yelled with a kind of assurance.

"You out there! You got to let me walk out of this house and give me a horse or I'll kill the girl!"

Grimes said, "Suit yoreself!"

Red bounced up from where he was untying the punchers and begged, "But my God, Jeb, Dora—he'll murder her, that fellow!"

"Shut up, son. 'F he gets out an' away he'll murder somebody else. Lots o' somebodies. Let 'im kill 'er if he wants. 'Twill be the last he ever does."

"But, Jeb!"

"Shut up, I told you!" said Grimes, harsh and stern. "I won't make no bargain with 'im."

Buck could hear. It made him mad because his plan wasn't working the way he had figured it ought. He yelled some cuss words and began to shoot. The reports were muffled. Some splintered spots appeared in the door. Buck had a bad temper and had lost it. He was blindly trying to shoot through, hopeful of hitting somebody. Red jumped a little to one side. Grimes did not move. His rifle could have smashed clear through the door and made things hot in the closet but he didn't shoot; just said with a low pleased sound, "He keeps that up, he'll suffocate hisself in thar."

The punchers were squirming on the floor and swearing, begging Red to hurry and turn them loose so they could do something. He went back to them.

As one, with Red's help, was shaking off the coils, he jerked his thumb toward Hal out there on the floor: "That city kid, he wasn't tied good and got his hands loose. He wiggled to a gun one o' them fellers you all killed had dropped an' he was waitin' for Buck an' them to come back in here. When Buck come in, *her* there!"—the puncher turned fiercely toward Mrs. Hepples—"she yelled, 'Look out, Buck!' "

Mrs. Hepple screamed, "Oh I never!"

The other puncher said, "Why you shore as hell did!"

"I never!" she yelled. "You just didn't hear right! I said, 'Look out!' to the boy because I knew they would kill him!"

"You are lyin' yore head off!" said one of the punchers in a slow amazed tone.

The other went on with: "That there kid he started shootin' but he was a mighty pore shot an' they just flocked lead into him, an' that purty girl who had been cryin' an' wasn't tied jumped up an' that Buck he whaled her over the head. Then you all come a-bustlin' in, an' Buck he jerked the girl up an' carried her before 'im out there into the hall, hidin' behind a woman, the dirty—"

"An' 's now hid like a skunk in a hole!" said the other puncher.

"How'd he catch you all?" Red asked, working at knots.

The puncher spoke fast and angered. "Me an' Clem here just come a-ridin' in this afternoon an' they had a man out there watchin', so we, not expectin' trouble, was stuck up an' hogtied like a pair of calfs! They picked themselves some good hosses, turned loose all the others an' loafed around here like they own the place. We didn't see Miz Hepple a-tall till you fellers rode up. Then Buck an' them acted mad an' brought 'er in here an' tied 'er up. But now, me, I think it was just a put-up job between 'em to make us think she wasn't in with Buck an' them! Look how she acted when that pore kid was there a-fixin' to kill Buck!"

"Gosh a'mighty!" Red murmured, peeking at Mrs. Hepple as if a little afraid of her.

Her lips flashed in movement, words came scornful and furious as she jerked her head at the Mexican woman, then at the Chinaman: "Why don't you accuse them, too, of being in with Buck! They weren't dragged in here and tied up till after I was!"

"They was busy fixin' supper!" said the puncher. "Was yanked in here so they wouldn't do no mischief after you all started raisin' so much glorified hell out there!"

Grimes told the punchers to get an ax. One went on the jump while the other helped Red to have a look at Hal. His face wasn't fat any more. It was thin and white as paper except for bruises. He was breathing in soft little panting gasps, and was bleeding. He had been all sore and worn out anyhow from the beatings yesterday, the hard riding since; and now had been shot twice, once in the shoulder and also in the leg above the knee. The shock of the bullets had numbed his nerves so that he wasn't feeling pain yet; but he was near dead from exhaustion anyhow.

The puncher and Red lifted Hal to a big wide swinging couch, covered with Indian blankets. Red talked to him, low and encouraging, but Hal was in a kind of stupor with eyes wide open. "Good leather, kid," Red murmured as he ripped the shirt from about the wound in the shoulder, having a look.

Red went across to the fat stolid Mexican woman, talked to her in Spanish and began to cut her loose. She seemed stupidly sullen and stared as if distrustful; then suddenly asked, "You are the son of The Sheriff?"

A lot of people, especially among the Mexicans, still meant Red's father when they said The Sheriff. In other parts of the country bad men might not have thought it worth while to notch a gun if they killed what they called a "greaser," but it had sure been bad luck, while The Sheriff was in the saddle, to trouble honest Mexicans in Tulluco.

The Mexican woman said, "They killed Señor Hepple in his bed. *She* had them do that. She is a devil-woman! They talked in Spanish and did not know I listened. She wanted Señor Hepple to die so the ranch would be her own and it would look as if the bandits had killed him."

Red said vague things under his breath

and twisted about for another look at Mrs. Hepple. The Mexican woman hadn't hushed her voice at all, and Mrs. Hepple was not more than two long steps away but she had not heard a word. Her eyes were again fixed on old Jeb Grimes. Now her face, even if did not have a wrinkle, didn't look at all pretty. It was all out of shape with just plain fright; and the look in her eyes made Red think of how a crippled snake stares, hoping for a chance to bite.

The Chinaman was huddled down like a bunch of rags with a wax head. Red cut him loose and told him to bring towels and water.

The puncher that had gone for the ax came back on the run with two. Red started across the room and Mrs. Hepple called to him, partly coaxing and part as if giving an order: "Help me loose, Red. This rope hurts and—" Her voice changed to a quick low tone, slightly hoarse and caressing, as if somehow promising a lot of things: "Red, that old man there knows that I know he murdered my father! He'll kill me because I can have him hanged!"

Red simply backed off without a word. He had an almost scared feeling as if she were something strange and dangerously evil.

FROM inside the closet Buck yelled threats at the punchers who swung their axes. He shot again and again into the door. They yelled back at him, jeering; said for him to keep right on shooting and so choke himself to death on smoke. He tried to scare them by saying if they didn't stop he would come busting out with guns blazing when the door was chopped down. They told him to come a-whoopin' just any old time he took the notion.

The door was heavy and the hinges had been hammered out of iron. It was a job to cut the door down because it opened on the inside and the hinges were fastened on the inside; but the punchers swung joyfully as if doing something that was a lot of fun.

Buck suddenly changed his tune and called, "Fellers? Hey fellers, lis'en!"

The punchers paused to hear what he had to say. Grimes told them to keep at work. "We," said Grimes, "don't care what he says!"

Buck got louder and louder with a kind of panic in his voice. His bad temper had cooled down into a plain realization of what he was up against.

"I ain't hurt her! I wouldn't hurt a woman! I was only bluffin' a while ago! But she has fainted! So don't think I hurt 'er! I'll give up an' come out if you won't—"

At the offer to surrender the punchers swung down their axes and stepped back; but Grimes said, "Keep a-cuttin'!" It wasn't Grimes' way to parley with Buck's kind nor to accept a surrender.

The punchers understood and gave a glad yelp because they sure had it in for Buck and didn't want him to get off alive. They spit on their hands and went to it. They had never in their lives used an ax for more than cutting wood for a camp-fire; but they put their weight into their blows and hacked raggedly. The door was soon shaky. The top hinge broke loose, swayed away from the post. They hooked the ax blades through the opening and swung back, heaving. There was a grinding sound, then the snap of the lower hinge breaking. The door swayed, turned a little. They took hold of it with their hands and pulled, careless of Buck's chance to shoot at them.

The door came free. They jumped back and let it go. It fell flat with smashing bang; and there stood Buck with hat still on and his hands away up. He said, quick and eager.

"I ain't armed! I give up! Don't shoot!"

His guns lay on the floor at his feet.

Red was so mad that he said things and looked about to shoot anyhow.

Grimes pushed in before Red and kept his rifle waist high, the muzzle almost against Buck's belly. Grimes, soft and calm as if talking to a child about how to play mumblepegs, said:

" 'Tain't right, son, for to shoot a man with his hands up!"

Buck grinned a little at that. Red snarled, "When did you go an' get soft-hearted!"

"Don't get overhet," Grimes advised with gentle bubble-like sound in his throat. "Things has to be done right." To Buck, "Git out here where I can have a good look at you." Buck moved, suddenly wary and anxious as he watched Grimes' face.

Grimes pulled loose the chin strap, took off Buck's hat, had a look, slapped the hat back on and said to the punchers, "Tie his hands behind him, good." To Red, "Go fetch in some horses."

Red paid no attention but went into the closet and struck a match. The closet was nearly suffocating with powder smoke. He shook out the match, gathered up the limp unconscious Dora and carried her out.

Buck said earnest and quick while the punchers were tying his hands behind him, "I didn't touch her!"

"You're a liar!" said one of the punchers. The other, "We seen you hit 'er!"

"I just was crazy mad for a minute," said Buck. He seemed honestly to feel that the justification was quite the same as a denial. "She ain't hurt. Just scairt a little!"

"Go fetch in some horses, Red," Grimes told him again.

"All right. In a minute," Red said indifferently and got down on his knees beside the stolid Mexican woman who was putting water on Dora's cold pale face.

"I reckon," Grimes was saying to Buck, "that woman over there has made quite some fool out of you, after all, hm? Them bankers never told you to raid the Dobbses like you done. They got more sense!"

Mrs. Hepple yelled, "I didn't! I never! I don't know a thing about him! Them Johnsons sent him out with a letter and—"

She might as well have been talking to the wind for all the notice Grimes took of her. Grimes turned, spoke sharp to Red:

"Go fetch in horses!"

AN HOUR later, or nearly that, when Red came back riding The Ghost and leading Grimes' ewe-neck and a couple more horses, Buck was sitting in a chair, looking glum. Grimes rested on a corner of the big table and looked more like something carved out of dark wood than a man, with the rifle across his knee. The two Hepple punchers also looked pretty solemn; and Mrs. Hepple was crying. Something had been talked about that Red didn't know about.

As soon as Red came in, Grimes straightened, "All right. Be a-movin', Buck!"

Buck snuggled down heavier in the chair. "Why don't you take me into the sheriff? You ain't got no right for to—"

"You been took to sheriffs before, I reckon. An' got away. As for the right, how about you ridin' down on the Dobbses, killin' them dogs, burnin' houses, stealin' hosses, shootin' men, carryin' off women? You damn outlaws talk loud about law an' rights when you get caught. So don't argy. Walk or be drug. All the same to me, but you're goin'!"

Buck took a deep breath, tightened his mouth, shrugged his broad shoulders. He looked across toward Dora. His lips worked a little before he spoke. He looked at Grimes, but Grimes' wrinkled face was set and impassive. Buck looked from one to the other of the punchers.

"Fellers," he said, "I ain't proud of what I done—hidin' behind her. But I was cornered with all my men killed. They seemed no other way to—to run

a bluff. God A'mighty, I liked that girl! I was goin to be good to her, but—"

Red fidgetted, wanting to speak up, mad; but he didn't.

"Past time for talk," said Grimes, and jerked his head.

"How about a cigarette first?" Buck's mouth looked queer, like he was trying a little to grin and his lips didn't want to. Somehow he seemed trying to be brave.

Grimes said to one of the punchers. "Twist 'im a smoke."

"Shore, oh shore," said the puncher, nervous-like, but willing. The paper trembled in the boy's fingers and he spilled much tobacco but got a lump-bellied cigarette shaped up, put it to Buck's lips, struck a match.

Buck didn't say "Thanks." He seemed forgetful from having so much else to think about. He inhaled as if sighing and blew smoke in sigh-like puffs. "Two hours more an' I'd been headed for the Border. That there is luck f'r you!"

"Border or not," Grimes told him, "we'd 've followed. I've done it for men I didn't want near as bad as you." Grimes took him by the arm. "Come 'long."

Buck looked as if he were going to pull back, but changed his mind and stood up. His lips moved. He was trying mighty hard to grin. His eyes went about to see if fellows were noticing that he was smiling; and they stared at him, solemn and tense.

Red and the punchers followed slow and walking light-toed as Grimes, with a hand on Buck's arm, marched him down along the hall, out of the house and up to the ewe-neck. Red and the punchers stopped and stood back a little way. They looked as if they wanted to be so quiet they wouldn't be noticed. The stolid Mexican woman, still holding a wet cloth, blotted out the light in a window where she leaned, peering.

Grimes took his rope from the ewe-neck's saddle, gave it a toss and pulled it slowly through his fingers, recoiling it. He made a small loop, took off Buck's hat, spun it off to one side and fitted the loop snug to Buck's neck.

Buck said in a husky voice, "I never did like neckties." He was making a little joke but nobody paid any attention.

"Help 'im climb up," Grimes ordered.

The two punchers edged forward, not eager. Buck said, savage, "I was a damn fool not to shoot it out instead of. . . . Oh, Christ!" Nobody answered. For a moment or two he seemed making up his mind whether or not to struggle. He didn't struggle but wasn't helpful. He was a big broad fellow and not easy to heave up with hands tied behind him. Then, suddenly, Buck said, "Oh, hell, let's have it over with!" He poked his feet into the stirrup and reeled up into the saddle. He settled himself with a kind of resolute straightening of shoulders and put his boot toe into the other stirrup. "My last ride, huh?" It sounded as if his throat was tight.

Grimes held the rope and took up the reins. He led the ewe-neck over into the shadows of the cottonwoods and stopped below a limb not more than four or five feet above Buck's head. Grimes kept a grip on the reins as he gathered the coil and tossed it up over the limb. The rope fell with a smooth slithering sound. He picked it up, tied the end about the tree, being careful to fix a knot that would not slip. Then he walked out in front of the horse, tugged at the reins and clucked. The horse seemed to know what was being done and didn't want to move.

Buck said in a kind of loud-tempered voice, as if desperate but bragging, too, "By God, I ain't ascairt to die!" and drove his spurred heels into the ewe-neck's flanks.

The horse jumped. Grimes checked it back with high reach of arm and yank of reins. A sudden hard jerk of so much weight would have snapped the rope.

Grimes then simply walked forward, leading the horse and did not look back.

When he turned and came around the other side of the tree the saddle was empty.

GRIMES sat on a corner of the table with his rifle leaning close by and reached across for some bread and a piece of meat. Grimes was hungry. He hadn't had a bite at Macaw's and nothing all day. He folded the bread over the meat and chewed. Between bites he told Red to fix up the sick people as best he could. "Then we'll be ridin,' son."

Red asked, "What of her?" and pointed at Mrs. Hepple. He had known for a long time that there was some mystery between her and Grimes, and tonight her fear showed almost hysterically; but Grimes screwed his leathery neck around, took a look as if he hadn't noticed her before, chewed and swallowed. "She's ridin' with us." He took another big bite.

Mrs. Hepple gasped as if hard hit with a fist and threw herself back against the rocker. Her dark face looked as gray as dirty wool.

The two punchers fidgetted a little, and one said haltingly, "Maybe we did misjudge her some an' 'sides she is our boss an'—"

Grimes pointed a long arm at the swinging couch where Hal Mason lay. "Feller, thar is yore boss. That Hepple kid. An' she as shore as hell meant to have them outlaws drag 'im off some'eres an' be murdered. Like she done ol' Dingley. Go take a look."

Red and the punchers, one holding a lamp, tiptoed through the sprawling house as if respectful and quiet for fear of waking old Dingley Hepple.

He had been shot in his bed. One of the punchers in a hushed voice said that something was wrong with his legs so he couldn't move them; had been like that for a long time.

Red stared at the big bony face with protruding bony lumps over eyes that had been fiercely bright and piercing. Red pulled a blanket up across the body. The puncher set the lamp on a stand and turned the wick low. They took off their hats, then went out on tiptoes.

Grimes laid hold on another slice of bread and some more meat, reached afar for the mustard and dabbed on a thick spread, folded the bread and wadded a big bite into his mouth. He chewed complacently, as if meditating on how good it tasted.

Dora had been carried into a room and put to bed with the Mexican woman sitting by. Dora was almost out of her head in terror. The Mexican woman came with a kind of stolid haste into the dining room and called Red. He went in and sat on the bed with Dora staring hard at his face and holding tight to his hand. He told her over and over that Buck and his men were wiped out. She believed him but she could not feel secure.

She asked Red if there had been a stage robbery and murder, and did he think Charley Hepple had been in it? Red hesitated a little, then with vast assurance said—

"Oh, Buck he was a powerful liar, some ways. You get some sleep."

The Mexican woman gave her a big drink of whiskey in water. That seemed to relax Dora and she lay quiet as if she were sleeping uneasily with her eyes open.

When Red went back, Grimes was smoking a cigarette and looking toward Hal as he talked to the punchers. Grimes' voice was low and had a purr.

"You boys keep him quiet as you can with cold water packs. He is sufferin' but they is nothin' more you can do till a doctor gets here. He is from the East an' soft, a little. But he is old Dingley's boy an' bein' easy scairt wasn't among the faults Dingley had. This boy takes after him some. An' like I said, he is yore boss from now on. What is more, he is married to Miz Dobbs' grand-

daughter. Miz Dobbs 'll hate the ground he walks on but they will be no more rowin' 'tween you fellers an' us Dobbses. Matter of fact, few years more an' nesters 'll have all us outfits fenced off the range."

Grimes picked up his rifle and told Red to turn "that woman" loose.

She rocked back and shrank as much as she could. Her face was stretched wide with fright and she said, almost screaming—

"I won't go with you!"

Grimes told her a low cold tone, "You throw a fit like I know you can, an' I'll leave you danglin' on the same cottonwood limb with that Buck feller!"

Mrs. Hepple gave a wild look about and called to Red, "You wouldn't let him—" Red didn't look helpful and she turned to the punchers: "I always liked you boys and now—"

Grimes noticed that they stirred uneasily. He said, "You boys had better set calm." It was a friendly warning, but a warning. He eyed them to see if they were going to take his advice; and when it looked like they were, he nodded a little in approval, then explained:

"F'r one thing, she ain't Miz Hepple a-tall. I mean her former husband, 'r one of 'em—she's had most a dozen I reckon —ain't dead. She done her best to be rid of him. An' her best is purty bad. Hired a couple o' fellers to kill 'im. They got bad hurt out in the hills, tryin' it. One of 'em he talked some after the other died with a wad o' rifle right square through his heart. Then her husband he changed clothes with one of 'em and rode off. Later on when the bodies was found, it 'peared like the husband was one of the dead men. Howsomever, she soon knowed he wasn't 'cause he sent in word as how he hoped they'd meet again, soon. He done that just so she'd do some worryin'. But 'pears like she didn't, much. Not enough to spile her looks. She changed her name an' lit out for whar she wasn't knowed. That was purt-near twenty-five year ago, so you all can see that she started in mighty young. Me, I know where her husband is an' I'm going to see as how she has a talk with him."

Red had untied the rope. Mrs. Hepple rubbed at her arms and looked down, not moving. She was so scairt she was weak. Grimes dropped the cigarette, stepped on it, walked over and took her by the arm, firmly.

She pushed at his hand. "You're hurting. I'll come." Her tone and air were sad and hopeless as if she were just a poor lone woman being mistreated.

Grimes kept hold on her arm and walked her out of the house. She dragged her feet a little and had her head down. Out in the shadows he let go of her arm and told Red to help her into the saddle. She had on skirts and it was a man's saddle. It wasn't easy for her to mount. She put her arm close around Red's neck and as he was trying to give her a lift she whispered quickly, "Help me and I'll—"

There was a shot. The horse jumped. Red jumped, too, and Mrs. Hepple almost fell.

Grimes spoke coldly: "Purt-near twenty-five year ago she cooked up a tale by whisperin' quick and soft thataway as made me kill a feller as didn't deserve it. Now, Bess, if you start whisperin' again I'll shoot some'eres else than at the ground!"

The two punchers came running to the door and called, "What's the matter?"

Grimes told them quietly, "Nothin'—yet."

After that she climbed up on the horse pretty quick without Red having to help much. Grimes swung into his saddle and rode up alongside of her. When their horses were a little way off from the house, Grimes said:

"Red, jog along toward town, sorta at a walk after you get on ahead apiece. Me an' my wife is goin' have some talk, private."

Red said, "Sure" and spurred ahead. He felt queer and uneasy because Grimes was a dangerous man; and to Red's range-bred way of thinking, no matter what all Mrs. Hepple had done she was a woman, with the look of a lady about her. What maybe ought to be done to women wasn't to Red, or the men like him, the right thing to do, somehow. He rode about a quarter of a mile ahead and pulled down, sneaking a look once in a while back across his shoulder. Sometimes he could see shadow-blotches plodding along far back on the dusty-white road and sometimes he couldn't.

He rode on and on, walking his horse and trying to think things over, but his head wasn't clear, and now that the excitement had passed he was dead tired and worn out.

There was the sound of a gallop behind him. Grimes, alone, rode up alongside and said as they had better get on a little faster. They trotted for a spell in silence with Red hoping any moment that Grimes would speak up. Grimes didn't. Red felt he oughn't be meddlesome; but he felt, too, that he would bust if he didn't find out; so he asked—

"What'd you do, Jeb?"

Grimes spoke wearily. "Not right, son. I've made more mistakes with that woman than purt-near with ever'body else in the world put together." His voice was soft and low, almost as if wanting Red's approval: "I said for her to get out of the country an' never come back. That if she did, I'll kill her. Would, too."

"You've knowed all along these years who she was?"

"An' nearly busted my galluses a time 'r two keeping her from findin' out who I was. You see, Red, when she showed up, I heard about the widder lady as was makin' a fool o' old Ding Hepple. But it's a way widders has, so I never thought. When one day I seen her. Well, I didn't have no such likin' for Ding Hepple as to want to save him from the trouble she was shore to make 'im, sooner or later."

"Me, I decided to keep away from her, least-wise f'r a while, and say nothin'. The which I done. Sorta settin' by, so to speak, all these years with my ace in the hole. Tonight I played it in the showdown for to keep her an' Pink from gettin' that ranch. Sure as hell's a foot deep, she'd have had them Buck fellers drag off young Hal some'eres an' kill him."

"Who is Pinky, Jeb? An' Joe Bush?"

"Don't ask me. I bet both of 'em had diff'rent dads."

"Where'd she come from?"

"She was a gambler's daughter when I first knowed her over in Colorado. So purty you jest couldn't believe yore eyes. An' a selfisher critter never was on two legs."

"But where 'll she go now?"

"To hell, I hope. But I bet from now on they is wrinkles a-plenty in her face."

"Jeb, do you think maybe she put Buck an' them up to burnin' us Dobbses out?"

"Well, son, I don't know. Maybe she did. Maybe Buck just done it out of his own cussedness. 'Twasn't them Johnsons, you can bet. An' right now, you can bet too, they are plenty scairt. That mortgage business 'll fix the blame on 'em anyhow. Them riggin' a hold-up an' Cramer and the messenger bein' killed is plumb mighty bad. That sheep deal 'll rile all the cowmen. Bein' in with gamblers was purty stinkin,' too. And us riding along into town now for to argy with 'em a little won't be very soothin'."

Red thought a while and his thoughts worked around until he said, "Pore old Bill Nims!"

"Yes sir, son, Bill he is in a bad way. With Sally Nims all riled over Bill not bein' plumb honest, and her savage old dad oilin' up his buffalo gun—well sir, I reckon Bill 'll purt-near wish he'd died o' croup in the saddle. I allus sorta half way liked Bill. He's goodhearted."

They rode on a while, then Grimes spoke up, calm and mild:

"Now 'bout my wife. From now on, son, jest suppose you an' me don't ever make no reference to her between ourselves even, an' so of course not to other parties, ever."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TO EACH AS HE DESERVES

IT WAS long about one o'clock in the morning and some ten miles from town when they heard a buckboard coming fast out ahead of them on the road, and they saw a wagon rocking behind horses that were galloping. The dust flew up like smoke from under hoofs and wheels.

Grimes and Red put their horses in the middle of the road and waited. The driver pulled down and called doubtful, "Hey, what you fellers want?" He was the livery stable man.

A woman was on the seat with him. As Grimes and Red rode up close, Catherine cried out eagerly: "Oh, it's Red! And Jeb!"

Red said, "Of all folks! What the devil you doin' out here this time o' night?"

"I'm going to my husband."

Red whistled low and soft, half laughed, swore, said admiringly, "Well, can you beat that, Jeb!"

Grimes pushed up his hat. A nice smile showed in the starlight on his grim old face. He spoke in his softest tone:

"I don't know whicher of you two kids ort to be proudest of the other. He's proved a good feller. And you've got the sort of spunk as has made Miz George's men—"

"What of that Buck?" Catherine asked.

"We kept our promise," said Grimes, mild and grave.

"And Hal?" From the way she asked they could tell she was holding her breath for the answer.

"He got into the fight like a good feller!" said Red.

"And was he hurt?"

"'Pears like he got nipped in the shoulder a mite. Leg, too, a little, but—"

"Oh, Hal has been shot? Is it serious?"

"Nothin' your bein' by him won't cure. But how you come to be comin'—"

"Oh Red, Grandmother was so mad over Hal. It was terrible! Just as bad as you said it would be. I thought she was going to use that quirt on me! She said for me to get out of her sight and never let me see her again! She said she never wanted to hear my name again! She wouldn't listen when I—"

"I knowed about how it would be," Red admitted.

"I didn't know what to do. I tramped up and down in the room there at the hotel until I dropped. I must have been worn out and slept. When I woke up I knew I ought to go to Hal. And the Hepple ranch was the only place I knew to look. I felt I just couldn't sit in a saddle again. I went to the livery stable and had a hard time to get the man there to get this driver for me. But here I am! And Hal isn't badly hurt, honest?"

"We'll be sendin' Doc Barstow along out. Don't you fret."

Catherine shook the driver's arm. "We must hurry!" She threw up a hand and called, "Oh Red, I hear that the doctor says Sara has a chance!"

The driver, making ready to send the horses on their way, spoke loud: "Folks has been ridin' out to Huskinses an' comin' back with their eyes poppin'! You boys 'pear to be might economic in your shootin'—one bullet, one hide!"

He shook the reins, yelled. The horses jumped. Catherine was rocked back against the seat and passed with hand a-flutter at Grimes and Red.

Red looked after the dust cloud that rolled along the road. "I hope I didn't lie too much about Hal not bein' bad hurt. But he 'pears to be a feller with grit enough to brace up and get well to please a girl like that. Here me, I been frettin' about a Hepple maybe gettin' our ranch, and from now on it is a Dobbs as will run thern. Miss Kate is a Dobbs,

hair, hide and hoof! Nice folks, them Dobbses—though I am goin' to get my hide tanned, I bet, right soon by the nicest of 'em!"

GRIMES and Red jogged into town a little before three o'clock. The town lay dark and quiet. Some of the all night places had their doors wide open and lights showed through, but nobody was making noise. Even the all-night girls had gone to bed. In passing the Best Bet Red leaned low in the saddle for a better look and saw a few figures huddled about a poker table and a bartender drowsing with head propped on hand and elbow.

When they were near the bank, Red reined up with an air of something being wrong.

"What is it, son?"

Red pointed toward the bank, Grimes stared a little. "I don't see nothin'."

"That's the jigger. It is dark as the inside of a pill box. And allus they is two lamps burnin' low at the back there."

"What you figger?"

"That something is wrong, somehow. My dad used to tell folks anytime they see no light burnin' in the back to come to him and say so; and if he was out of town to take a scatter gun and go look for 'emselves. Do we go round back and have a look?"

They rode to the corner, dismounted and started down the alley. Grimes said in hushed approval, "I reckon as how you've got a good smeller!"

There were some horses in the alley back of the bank, five, saddled and bunched together.

A little thread's glimmer of light came through a crack out of a back window. Red put his nose near the crack, studied for a time, turned and whispered, "Folks is in there, talkin'. Blankets have been hung before the windows."

"I heard voices."

"I can't see good, Jeb. They are along up to about the middle of the room, where the safe is. We will just have a look in."

Red slowly took a firm hold on the door knob. He pulled the door tight against the jam and turned the knob. There was a slight scrape of moving latch. He pushed on the door a very little. Even then the angle was such that he could not see very well, but he could hear. He and Grimes crouched low, listening.

Bills Nims was saying in a deep slow voice, stubborn and angry, "I done wrong to be takin' money thataway from gamblers. I sorta wanted my wife to think I was a good business man. I told her it was money for cows—"

Old Johnson spoke up, throaty and irritable. "We ain't carin' what you told her. I'm tellin' you, you are a damn fool if you think you are goin' to stop us all from leavin' town an'—"

Nims interrupted, patient and deep of voice, "I've told you it was over that stage robb'ry an' killin' the messenger an' Cramer, the which I can't overlook—"

"How about you overlookin' what all Red Clark has done?" said young Milt Johnson, sarcastic and angry. "He killed Joe Bush and some other fellows! Him an' Grimes murdered them sheepherders, then look last night what happened at Huskinses! Besides all that he shot my dad there from the dark—"

"Milt," Nims cut in, deep of voice and now a little impatient, "I told you I had a letter from old Timton sayin' he shot your dad. He said that Red was a good feller an' as how he wouldn't have him blamed for—"

"I don't b'lieve 'im!" said Milt.

"Nor me!" said old Johnson.

"'Twas just a put up job to take the blame off Red!" That was a smooth mean sneering voice, and Red recognized it as Pinky's.

"I ain't goin' to let you all cut and run!" said Nims, firm and stubborn.

"Aw, the hell you ain't!" Pinky squawked. A shot followed.

Old Johnson bellowed, "Now you have played hell!" but Milt was saying, "You done right, Pinky!" just as Red went through the door with an almost gleeful yell:

"Get 'em up! Or don't! Suits me!"

Bill Nims had been shot through the head with his hands down and his gun in its holster. He was bulky and filled the chair so tight that he sat upright with head rolling off to one side as if in a drunken sleep.

There were four other men in the room, one of them young Windy Jones. At the the sight of Red, and Grimes following with rifle leveled waist-high, Windy jumped back and sent his hands a-kiting. Old Johnson, with his right arm in a sling, was standing by a table. His hand rested on some small tightly filled canvas sacks. He looked like a great big fat frog that had learned to stand on its hind legs and was now badly scared. He and Milt were dressed in old clothes with boots and spurs ready to ride.

Milt Johnson had a gun strapped on him but he jumped back for the bank's shotgun that was leaning against the wall.

Pinky had his smoking gun in his hand as Red came through and spoke. Pinky blurted, "Ow, God A'mighty!" and ducked down under the table, firing across the top. His aim was pretty good for a man so bad scairt. The bullet snagged Red's right arm and the jerk knocked him off balance. The rifle went off and Pinky settled down on the floor as if his legs had melted. There was about two ticks of a watch then Red shot with his left hand just as the rifle went off again and Milt Johnson spilled out from behind the shelter of the safe and lay on top of the cocked shotgun with two holes right through his head.

Old Johnson had his hand high up, but bellowed, "You've killed my boy!"

Red snapped, "Yes and I'd like to kill you, you—"

Grimes cut in, spoke cool, eying old Johnson: "And if you know what is good for you, you'll make some move so we can. 'Twill beat prison at yore age!"

But old Johnson got right up on tiptoes so he could put his one good arm up higher and he begged, "Ow, don't boys! Please—I—"

Windy was back to the wall with his hands high in the air and his face looked woeful. Windy was just a good easy-going kid who had got mixed up with a bad lot. His mouth twitched a little before the words came. "Red, I'm a goner!"

"I reckon you are, Windy. A toss-up between prison an' the rope."

"But Red, honest to God, I didn't have no part in killin' Cramer an' the messenger!"

"'Cept you throwed in with them as did, Windy."

"But 'twas Buck an' Gene. Buck he said he'd show us all how to hold-up a stage an' Red? Red, you give me a chanct an' I'll help you get that feller Buck 'cause he's swore to kill you an' —"

"He's danglin' by the neck on a cottonwood, Windy, over to Hepple's Ranch!"

Windy said, "Oh God!" and leaned back against the wall as his knees suddenly went weak.

Grimes fingered one of the canvas bags. It was full of money, gold by the weight. "Hm, they was ready to ride —and pack!"

FELLOWS came running from late poker games and a bartender or two with white aprons tucked inside waistbands. Word got about through the town and many folks were awakened to hear the news, dressed and came.

It was easy to guess that the Johnsons had planned to rob their bank, clear out of the country, taking along

Pinky and Windy as a sort of guard.

Mrs. George came from the Golden Palace. She hadn't been asleep, not even undressed, but sat smoking and thinking. She looked pretty tried and much thinner, with deepened wrinkles in her tanned old face.

Men fell back to make way for Mrs. George. She came in walking slow and looked all about. Her gray eyes were bright and keen, but for once she didn't appear to know how to say something that was on her mind.

Red noticed with a sinking heart that she gave him merely a glance, sort of like he was a stranger, and that was all.

She stopped before the dead sheriff, put her hand to her mouth, looked down at him a long time and said, "Poor old Bill." Then she added with a kind of catch in her voice, "Poor Sally!" She turned around and looked hard at old Johnsons, but didn't say anything. Didn't need to. She just looked everything she felt and old Johnson seemed to sag and shrivel a little.

Her hand rested on a canvas sack and she leaned there a while before she realized what it was and fingered the coin through the canvas. Then she sort of absently brushed her fingertips together as if brushing away some dirt.

All of a sudden she stiffened, turned on Grimes:

"Jeb, I won't stand for no damn foolishness out of you. You've quit my ranch. So I'm going to see that you're put where you'll do this country some good. You've got to be sheriff! You hear me? I don't think any folks will object. They'd better not!"

Grimes said, "Shucks, Miz George!" but he was pleased.

Mrs. George turned around and looked at Windy. For a moment he stared back, hopeful and pleading, then his eyes fell. Windy had been a boy she liked onct, and she felt some hurt that he had turned out bad.

She asked for papers and tobacco. Red made a jump to offer his, but she appeared not to notice and took them from a bald bartender. As she rolled the cigarette her eyes sort of sneaked slant-wise toward Red. A man struck a match and she lit the cigarette, then as if not able to hold herself in any longer, snapped:

"Red!"

"Yes'm, Miz George."

"I ain't never going to forgive you! Not to my dying day I won't! Helping Kate fool me thataway a—a *Hepple!*"

Red said nothing. She sure sounded mad, but somehow a little as if not quite so mad as she sounded.

"Well, ain't you got anything to say for yourself?"

"No'm, Miz George. 'Cept he showed hisself to be a good feller an'—"

"I don't want to hear! I don't want to hear even his name mentioned, ever! Nor hers!"

Red spoke humbly. "I reckon you won't from me then."

Mrs. George looked him up and down, saw that there was blood on the arm that Red had been holding behind him. Her eyes brightened anxiously and she came up, took hold of him. "It ain't nothin'," he said.

"Red?" Her tone changed to a friendly sound and her face softened into a vague smile. "Red, I won't ever forgive you, but I owe you a mighty big apology. When I came back to town from the Nims ranch, I had a talk with Deputy Marr and he was so positive and earnest about it being you that shot Johnson—well, Jeb there was right! I ought've had more sense."

Red, all warm and pleased, said, "Aw shucks."

"And Red?"

"Yes, ma'am!"

"They's no use, I reckon, hoping you'll ever change, much. A body has to put up with you the way you are. You know cows and you know men. Poor old Robertson is dead. Jeb here is to

be sheriff. Harry Paloo and Slim Hawks are both too lazy for any earthly use except when there is some trouble. So I guess I'll have to put you in as foreman!"

IT WAS about seven months later that Mrs. George and Red rode up on lathered horses one afternoon and swung off under the cottonwoods before the Hepple ranch house. She went hurrying right along in without knocking and Red tagged after her.

Mrs. George had never in her life been near the house before and she looked about, turning this way and that, until guided by a thin wail she set off down the hall, flung open a door and walked in.

Hal was there, looking helpless and anxious. The fat stolid Mexican woman bent over the bed where Catherine lay, pale and tired and worried. The squalling baby waved both clenched fists as if in anger at high heaven, its face distorted and red.

Mrs. George stripped her gloves, flung them at the floor, pushed the speechless Hal out of her way, shouldered off the Mexican woman, and said—

"Give me that little young un!"

She grabbed up the boy-baby like a kidnapper and struck aside Catherine's feeble protesting hands. Catherine seemed to think that a baby was something like brittle spun glass and as easily broken.

Mrs. George sat down brusquely, put the baby face down on a knee, joggled her foot, patted its back. The baby belched a little two or three times and stopped yelling. Then Mrs. George cuddled it close up to her breast, swayed slightly as if rocking and began crooning low.

The name of the baby was Clark Grimes Hepple, and it straightened up, stared with vague eyes at Mrs. George's sharp wrinkled face; then it poked out tiny rosebud fists, nudged the old leathery cheeks, got its fingers tangled in her hair and gurgled gleefully.

Red took a furtive tug at Hal's arm, lead him out of the room, closed the door softly.

"Ever'thing it is all right now, Hal. You kids are forgiven. She can't resist babies. That's how I get on so well with her. She remembers when I wore diapers."

THE END

SEVEN DAYS TO STEEL

By ROBERT E. PINKERTON

"BONANZA!"

It burst from Roger Carr without his volition, or his knowledge that he had shouted. For a long minute he stared at the speckled white rock, then jumped to his feet and ran along the low ridge in a frenzy of exultation.

He ran silently, for the heavy moss of the Canadian wilderness was like a feather bed. Every few strides he leaped, to strike the slope with legs stiff and heavy soles plowing up the thick forest carpet and rolling it back.

Always the result was the same. Amazing gold bearing quartz was exposed by an act as simple as a boy jumping into mud puddles with his first rubber boots. The extent and richness of the ledge were astounding. Chips with the hammer in a dozen places gave Roger samples of ore never encountered in the six years he had spent examining prospects for others, and aiding others to make fortunes.

But this fortune was his own. He held an option on the claims, which had been discovered the previous fall by a prospector whose judgement he trusted. The price was not great. Now Roger knew he was acquiring one of the richest properties in Canada for a song, even though that song meant every cent he could scrape and borrow. At twenty-eight, he was climbing fast.

Roger Carr went on along the ledge, laughing aloud at the ridiculous ease with which he exposed the ore. Often he stopped to use the hammer. He knew quartz, how it deceives, but he was sure of this. And, of course, he would have it assayed when he got out.

Abruptly he stopped. Abruptly his elation vanished. For the first time in many weary, driving days, he had been blind to his real problem. Now, more

than ever, he must get out, out to steel by July fifteenth to take up his option.

Roger had known from the first it meant a fight. First, against the wilderness itself, eight hundred miles of savage rivers and sullen lakes, of deadening toil and ceaseless driving. Previously, a wild cat outfit in Toronto had tried to force the options from him, and had only succeeded in causing the delay that now made the time element so vital.

But most important was Alec Price, indispensible as a guide in that unmapped region, yet wholly untrustworthy.

Roger forgot the fortune that lay beneath his feet when he thought of Price. He became of the forest itself, silent, furtive, senses raw. In the shelter of a spruce thicket, he slipped down into the swamp and circled back toward the west end of the ledge.

At first he thought it was a moose on the low ridge, the twin pairs of legs, one so close behind the other. Then the legs separated just as they vanished. Two men had been following him. They must have heard him shout "Bonanza." Perhaps they had watched his mad antics.

Roger cut across behind them and hurried down to the lake shore. Mooseonce, his third man, an Ojibway who knew no English, lay asleep beside the canoe.

Again Roger turned west, this time across a point to another small bay. From the bush, he saw Alec Price and his second canoeman, Peter Hendry, embarking. They paddled away toward camp.

"So that's it!" Roger muttered. "I'd counted on Hendry in a pinch. Mooseonce can't understand, so he's out of it. Now it's me against the two of 'em."

It was more than that, he knew, for the bleak, pathless north was their ally. Roger must have Price to get out on time, just as he had been compelled to accept him in the beginning.

Roger's friend, Dave Connor, storekeeper in Sabawi, had assembled the crew and started them down Wolf River, where Roger and Dave overtook them. Alec Price had given Dave another name, and as soon as Roger saw the man he had refused to take him. Two years earlier, he had fired Price from a crew. Price was the best cook in the bush, had a passion for cooking, but he had shown himself to be mean and thoroughly dishonest.

"I'm sorry about this, Rodge," Dave Connor had said, "but you'd lose a week getting back to make a change, and Price is the only man I could find who's been in that country. The surveyors did more guessin' than surveyin' in Kabatogama and Caribou. Their maps would do to start a fire with, may be. So if you have to make this eight hundred miles by July fifteenth, you've got no chance without someone who knows the way. But you can ride this feller, ride him and tame him. And if he causes any trouble, I'll get him when he comes out."

Now Lakes Kabatogama and Caribou, huge and filled with island mazes, still lay before Roger, and it was there that Price, if he knew the value of the claims, would cause trouble.

Roger returned to the ledge and worked swiftly the rest of the day, examining the entire vein and taking many samples. Everything he found indicated that the prospect was immensely valuable, but his elation had vanished. Alec Price could have known the location of the claims only through prior information from Toronto. Purposely, Roger had camped two miles away that Price might not discover where he was working. Yet Price had known. The Toronto outfit's hand was showing again.

Price and Hendry were in camp when Roger and Mooseonce returned that evening. Price did not look up from his work at the cooking fire. He had made pies and cookies and a huge chocolate cake, had baked beans in a bean hole and caught their first mess of fish. The

man had a passion for food. Hendry exclaimed over the meal. Mooseonce grinned and refilled his plate twice.

Roger ate in silence, watching Price gorge on his own cooking. Price was a big man, outweighing Roger by sixty pounds, and was fifteen years older. Only his face was not big. It was narrow, especially at the temples. His sharp nose was twisted, his lips thin and bloodless. Small eyes were dull and of a washed-out blue.

Yet he stood between Roger and success. The thought maddened Roger. Price was mean and craven. Roger had once told him so, and kicked him out of camp, two years before. Price had taken it.

"That crook can't lick me!" Roger muttered angrily. "It isn't in him."

His words were almost audible. The others looked up questioningly.

"What you say, boss?" Peter Hendry asked.

Roger slowly transferred a forkful of beans to his mouth. It was unthinkable that a man like Price should win. He could be tamed, could be compelled to show the way.

"I didn't say anything," Roger answered coldly, "but I will. We're starting on tomorrow."

"Yippee!" Hendry shouted. "We got here two days ahead of schedule, and that gives us two more on the four hundred miles. You're goin' to lose that bonus."

"I expected to when I promised it, and I still expect to pay it. But we're making a change. From now on, I paddle with Price. And I want you and Mooseonce to stick close to us, Hendry. You don't know the route and we can't afford a delay hunting for you."

Roger intended that as a direct challenge to Alec Price. He meant that if he paddled with Price, the man could not escape him, could not do anything of which Roger was not instantly aware. But if Price recognized the intent, he gave no sign. He was busy wolfing down the food he had prepared.

The next morning they began a struggle with huge Kabatogama. The wind, southwest, was dead ahead. As it increased, only Alec Price's knowledge of a sheltered passage through islands permitted progress the first day. After that they were forced to paddle at night, when the wind had died.

The islands were confusing, the map all but useless. Roger kept track of their position as best he could with compass, sun and stars. He was on guard ceaselessly, yet not once did he discover a suspicious act. They reached the southwest end of the lake on schedule, were now less than three hundred miles from steel.

Then, for a day, they battled a swift river. Alec Price threw his weight and strength against it, and at night they were in Caribou Lake. Near the outlet was another prospect on which Roger had an option.

The two days spent there were wasted. The ore was fair, but in small pockets. Roger was not disappointed. Kabatogama was so much richer than he had expected.

"We start out to steel in the morning," he announced after supper the second night.

Alec Price, as always, did not comment or even lift his head. Peter Hendry's voice cackled shrilly. Roger caught himself wondering if Peter were not sincere.

"That puts us five days ahead of schedule!" the canoeman exclaimed. "You counted on six days for the two prospects. And only a little more'n two hundred miles to go! Boss, you've lost your bonus."

Roger did not comment. The situation was tightening up. From the other end of Caribou Lake, anyone could find his way to steel by merely going up Caribou River. But the huge lake lay between.

When they started at dawn the next

morning, Roger's vigilance was implacable. Caribou was nearly as large as Kabatogama, and more crowded with countless small islands. Roger, in the bow, kept the map always before him, but soon found it would be of little or no value until they reached the opposite end. Most of the shore line was dotted, meaning it had been roughly sketched from Indian reports. The island mazes were only suggested.

ALEC PRICE led the way without hesitation. Roger, using a compass, knew only that the direction was right. Then, late in the day, Price called attention to a long, narrow point on the south shore with two small islands on either side of the tip.

"That's on the map," he said. "Half way down the lake. They say the survey party got lost and fixed the point by observations. Then they drew it in as it is, and got lost again."

The position checked with Roger's rough estimate of where they were. And Price had spoken almost in a friendly manner. Roger groped for the reason behind it.

An hour later, in camp, Peter asked to see the map.

"We've won that bonus, boss!" he exclaimed excitedly after studying it a while. "Off this lake by noon tomorrow, and nobody can get lost on a river. Six days to steel!'

Peter walked to the fire and peered into a frying pan.

"Suppose you can catch some more pike tomorrow, cook?" he asked. "They taste good after straight bacon."

"I'll try it," Price said.

But Alec Price overslept the next morning. He was contrite and rushed breakfast. The coffee was not good. He burned the bacon, and apologized humbly. Peter offered to help, and only added to Price's confusion. The man was so angry with himself he growled when packs were not placed in the canoes according to his plans for lunch.

As soon as they started, Price let out his trolling line.

"It may be rough on the big traverse," he explained to Roger. "Last chance to get a fish."

Peter and Mooseonce surged ahead when the line snagged on the bottom in a narrow passage among the islands. Price released it, and soon a big pike struck.

The fish fought furiously, dragging the canoe to one side. Roger, watching the battle, lost sight of the others. When at last he and Price started on, the passage before them was empty.

They paddled swiftly. Low clouds threatened wind and rain. The sun gave no hint of its position. The islands, scores of them, offered only narrow, twisting channels.

Alec Price, in the stern, was driving the canoe with powerful thrusts.

"They shouldn't 'a' got so far ahead," he complained. "Now we'll have to go back and wait for 'em."

Roger swung the bow. Price put more power into his strokes and they darted between the islands, one so much like another.

"If we had the rifle, we could bring 'em," Price said anxiously. "Crazy thing to do, goin' off like that. Peter's dumb."

"They'll shoot and we can pick them up," Roger said.

He and Price paddled on, listening. Price grumbled over the loss of time. Then they heard the familiar wilderness signal, three shots carefully spaced, but at a surprising distance, and behind them.

"How'd they get back there?" Price demanded in astonishment.

Roger dug in his blade and pulled the bow around. The canoe shot forward, but instantly swerved and grounded on a point. As Roger turned with an angry exclamation, Alec Price leaped into the

shallow water, grasped Roger by the shirt and dragged him ashore.

Swinging with both fists before his feet touched the beach, Roger fought with instant fury. Head down, boring in, he released the tension of weeks.

But a blow on the side of the head sent him reeling. A foot slipped, and one of Alec Price's heavy fists smashed to his jaw.

When Roger regained consciousness he was in the bow of the moving canoe. One arm was doubled under him and numb. His head ached. Blood dripped from his nose.

"Stay quiet," Price warned.

Roger sat up and looked around. They were still among the small islands that were so much alike. Very faintly, the sound of three rifle shots came from astern.

"You had better turn back," Roger said quietly.

Alec Price laughed. His eyes were aglint now, and cunning and assured.

"What do you want?" Roger demanded.

"Plenty!"

"You won't get it."

"I've got it now. Big mining man, eh? Wait until I get through with you."

"Price," Roger said slowly, "*you* can't beat me."

Price laughed, and drove the canoe on. Roger, maddened, started toward him over the packs.

"Listen, little spitfire," the big man said harshly. "I can break your neck any time I want. Behave, and you'll save yourself hide and blood. The whole thing's been planned too good for you to stop it."

"Dave Connor knows all about this," Roger said. "You can't go out alone. It's as good as a murder charge when a man leaves another in the bush."

"I'll not leave you. We're goin' to have a nice time together for two weeks. Then we'll go out to steel."

"Just what do you mean by that?" Roger felt him out.

Price laughed. "You know well enough. July fifteenth is quite some day in your life, ain't it? Me and my pardners know. You might as well be ten years late as get to steel on the sixteenth."

"All right! But when we do get to steel, you go to jail. Canada never did stand for kidnaping."

"Now, Rodgie, use your head," Price mocked. "Wasn't Peter dumb? And a dumb man gets lost easy. That's what Peter's done. He's so dumb he gets lost even with an Indian in the canoe. And we stay and look for 'em. Hunt days and days. You want to leave, but I say it ain't right. I'd never leave a man in the bush. Not me! We might even have an argument about it, and I hit you a few biffs. When we get into a Canadian court together, Rodge, my word's goin' to be just as good as yours, and sound truer."

Roger did not comment. He was considering all the factors in the situation, and the more he considered them, the less did he think of his chances. Peter and Mooseonce would wait, signaling, or—

Alec Price, paddling steadily and with strength, answered that.

"Didn't think I'd be too cute for you, eh?" he gloated. "And didn't I work hard for my bonus? I had to laugh when you offered us that extra fifty dollars apiece. I just told Peter I'd double it. And he'll earn the hundred if he gets those samples out on time. He's headin' for steel with 'em now. Easy to find Caribou River from where we left 'em."

Price laughed outright.

"It's been a funny deal all the way through," he continued. "Old Joe Macardel findin' those Kabatogama claims and then losin' his samples in a rapids on the way out. That's why he offered 'em to you so cheap, o' course. Nothin' to back up his word. My pardners in

Toronto didn't know Joe like you did and they didn't want to take too big a chance. So I waited until you saw the claims. The way you danced and yelled was enough for me. Now Peter's takin' out the samples to ship to my pardners, and the goose is hangin' so high a squirt like you can never reach it."

A little later he said, "Here's something to chew on. You couldn't get out by yourself if anything happened to me."

Roger understood that. He did not even know in which direction they traveled. A steady rain had set in, enshrouding the islands. From Price's frequent downward glances, Roger knew that he traveled by a compass on the floor between his knees. And each hour he was putting four more miles between themselves and where they had left the other canoe.

Physically, Price had a huge advantage. Weight and strength insured dominance. Even if Roger could overpower him by a trick, he was still confronted by the necessity of keeping the man prisoner and finding the way out.

Roger did not regret the rifle. In the far wilderness a firearm is not a weapon but a tool, a means of acquiring food in an emergency. And, even if he had it, Roger knew how impossible it would be to keep constant guard in canoe, on portages, while making camp, and at night.

Price did not stop for lunch. Roger studied the islands and open stretches, trying to fix the course in his mind. But he could not see far in the rain and had not the least idea of directions.

His captor saw this and grinned. "The drizzle's a piece o' luck I didn't count on. And now watch this."

He turned into a narrow channel, rounded an island, doubled back behind another. A current flowed against them as they went through a perfectly hidden passage.

"We're not even in Caribou Lake now," Price said.

He paddled on for two miles among more small islands, finally turned ashore on one. It was late afternoon, and Roger estimated they were thirty miles from where they had left Peter and Moose once.

"Now we eat!" Price gloated. "And you've got nothin' to do but sit and watch me cook."

Roger washed the dried blood from his face. He was stiff and cold from his long inactivity and the rain. He wanted to start his blood to moving, and to get away from Price. But as he walked down the shore he heard running steps and wheeled to find Price upon him.

The man's narrow face was twisted by fury. Roger had no time to meet the shock of the attack. His own anger was great, and he was desperate, but Price's weight and strength were too much. After a few moments of mad flailing, a heavy blow sent Roger reeling. Price was after him at once, striking again and again, even after Roger went down.

HE MUST have been unconscious a long while, for Price was busy cooking when at last he sat up. His face had been cut, his jaw and head ached, and pain stabbed his body in several places.

"I've got a lot more o' that and you can help yourself any time you feel like wantin' some," Price said harshly. "So listen! When I say sit down, do it. Can't have you sneakin' up behind me with an ax while I'm cookin'. Never go near the ax. Keep away from the canoe, too. Don't come within thirty feet o' me unless I say so. Mind yourself and what I say, and you'll get over bein' sore in a few days."

He let Roger bathe his swollen face and then indicated a windfall.

"That's where you stay," he commanded.

When the meal was ready, Roger was

ordered to the fire. They had not eaten since morning and Price had prepared bountifully. The man heaped his plate and ate with something more than relish. Roger's appetite shriveled before such greediness.

"This'll be grand for a couple o' weeks," Price chuckled. "Nothin' to do but cook and eat. We've got plenty o' grub."

After the meal, he ordered Roger into the canoe, threw his pack and blankets after, and paddled to a small island that lay two hundred yards from any other and directly opposite the camp.

"I remember how you wasn't much of a swimmer," Price said. "And this water's mighty cold. But with you over here, I'll sleep better. Sorry we haven't got two tents, but you'll make out."

Roger spent a miserable night. A fine rain fell. Mosquitoes swarmed about his bruised face. The blankets became clammy. His body ached.

Greater misery came from the helplessness of his position. Alec Price had planned and executed with a cunning Roger had never dreamed the man possessed. His methods and his acting on the long journey from Sabawi had been perfect. His future plans undoubtedly had been worked out as well. He had gained dominance in every way.

Roger did not waste time in regrets or self-blame. He had been compelled to accept Price as a guide or abandon the expedition. He had been without alternative after he discovered Price spying upon him at Kabatogama. He had accepted Price as a foe, confident that he would win.

As he looked at it now, after having encountered the maze of Caribou Lake, he doubted if he could have won despite any vigilance. Price had counted on that maze. He had waited for it.

The whole situation was maddening to Roger. He knew the man was small and mean and of false strength. Only a set of unusual physical conditions had given Price the ascendency. And yet, to Roger Carr, impending defeat was only a stiffer challenge. Bitterness was an admission of failure. The thing to do was to start afresh and beat Price.

He still had time. Only one of those five days ahead of schedule had been lost. Eleven days remained in which to travel two hundred miles, an easy journey even up-stream against Caribou River. Roger went to sleep without a plan, but with a conviction that Price could not win. He knew he was stronger than Price.

His captor came for him in the morning, and caught a large pike while paddling across. He had eaten his own breakfast but had provided well for Roger.

"I wouldn't see a dog go hungry," he said. "Grub is the biggest thing a man lives for, and the one thing he can't live without. Everybody eats. Everybody's got to eat. So why not eat well?"

When the breakfast dishes were washed, Price made a practice of his philosophy. He set dried apricots to stew while making sourdough bread, which was placed to rise in the warmth of the fire. After the apricots were done, and had cooled, he mixed a pie crust.

"Women don't know how to make a pie," he said. "The crust's got to be rich. Equal parts o' flour and lard. Then it tastes like somethin'."

He worked the ingredients together thoroughly with his fingers and patted out the dough on the flat bottom of the canoe. The pie was set to bake in that magic box of his, the reflecting baker, a light, folding affair of tinned steel. The open side faced a carefully built fire, the flames of which rolled up in a wall. Price studied the blaze and the browning pie with a portrait painter's appraising tilt of the head, and moved the baker forward or back as his careful judgement of the heat determined.

Roger found himself watching with a certain fascination. He had seen Price

at work many times, but always he himself had been busy. Now there was nothing to do except observe the care and pains the man never tired of taking when he prepared food.

After the pie was baked, Price found a sand beach close by and dug a large hole with a paddle. He built a fire in the hole, cut much wood, soon had a huge blaze roaring. He parboiled the beans, drained them, added boiling water, stirred in a cup of brown sugar, laid thick strips of salt pork over all and put on the lid.

He wrapped the pike in wet, green leaves and then encased it in clay. When the fire in the hole had been burning more than an hour, he raked out the glowing coals, set the pot of beans carefully upright in the bottom, laid the mud covered pike beside it and pushed in the hot sand until a cone stood where the hole had been.

"We'll have a feast tomorrow," Price exulted. "Now we'll think about today."

He made a big pudding of rice, raisins and condensed milk, baking it in the reflector. He baked a rich bannock in the frying pan, tending the golden brown loaf as carefully as a poet ever nursed a phrase. He parboiled salt pork, rolled it in corn meal and fried it with the attention of a French chef. Even Roger felt a glow of anticipation. The "sow belly," he knew, would taste like fried chicken.

Nor was Price content when the noon meal was eaten. Although he was without eggs, he made a three-layer cake with lard, butter, flour and baking powder, and thickly covered each layer and the whole with rich chocolate icing.

"And we've got to have broiled walleye for supper," he said.

Price trolled before the camp. Roger was always in sight, and once, when he started away from the windfall, he was warned to resume his seat. After supper he was taken back to his island. Another of the five hard won days was gone. Only three remained.

Roger refused to admit the hopelessness of his position, even as he sketched it again and again while lying in his blankets. Except for a Hudson's Bay Company post far to the northwest, no trace of civilization existed nearer than the railroad, two hundred miles to the southwest. The vast wilderness was empty. Even the Indians were at the posts and in the fur brigades. The north barred the way with swift, snarling rivers, with huge swamps, with unmapped lakes so broken by arms and points and countless islands they might hold a man prisoner for days.

Price came for Roger in the morning and they went back to another culinary orgy. Roger was ordered to his windfall after breakfast and the preparation of more food began.

Food in the raw! Food being cooked! Food being eaten! Roger, helpless, could do nothing except watch Price exhibit his artistry.

Roger began to lose his cool, appraising vision of the situation. He began to lose sight even of his impending financial disaster. The personal equation forced itself to the front. He saw his strength pitted against that of Alec Price in a world of their own, isolated and unapproachable, each without any possible outside aid. A contest between Roger and a gang of financial pirates, with a fortune at stake, ceased to have significance. This was man to man, and each dependent upon his own resources.

They had baked beans and fish that day, and another pie. Each bean was a golden brown, rich with pork fat and sugar. The clay had confined all the goodness within the pike. When its hard shell fell away, taking scales and skin with it, steaming white flesh was exposed.

Even Roger enjoyed it until Price looked across his plate and grinned. Something in those pale blue eyes told

that Price, too, understood the challenge of the situation, that he gloated in his supremacy.

"Time's passin', Rodge," the man jeered. "Ain't thinkin' o' takin' an ax to me, are you?"

Roger did not answer.

"Course you ain't," Price chuckled. "You got just so many days left. It's up-stream most o' the way to steel, with a lot o' portages. To get on time, you got to have me to paddle and pack."

He laughed as he wolfed down more of the savory fish.

"Besides," he added, "how'd you find the way alone? You got to be nice to me, Rodge."

The truth of that maddened Roger more than Price's sneers. He must have Price, to paddle and to show the way.

Thus a third day passed. On the fourth, pies and a cake came from the folding baker, more beans from the bean hole. Roger's whole future was crashing while the man baked as an artist paints and made bannock with a poet's absorption.

Only occasionally did Price stop to jeer.

"Don't worry, Rodge," he said. "I'll take care o' that."

He helped himself to more beans, beans such as only a bean hole can produce and no advertising writer can imagine.

"When we get out, you can't do a thing to me," he said. "My friends will take care o' that. They've got it all fixed."

After luncheon he asked, "How'd you like more wall-eye for supper. Fried in a lot o' bacon grease? Don't just the idea of it make you drool?"

A STIFF north breeze was blowing. Evidently the fish did not like it, for Price failed to get a strike in front of the camp. He drifted to leeward, around the island, and tried sheltered water.

Roger sprang to his feet. It was the first time he had been left alone, but at once he knew he was as helpless as before. The canoe was all that counted now, the canoe and getting out on time. Even without Price, he might find his way along the shore to the mouth of Caribou River. But Price had the canoe.

Roger turned back to his accustomed windfall. For the first time he began to admit defeat. Eight days remained, yet he might as well sit down and go on watching his captor cook and eat and cook and—

The idea blinded him with its completeness. Price not eating! Price, the food worshipper, with nothing to eat!

Roger darted along the shore and looked through the brush. The canoe was down-wind nearly a quarter of a mile, Price fighting a big fish. As Roger looked, the fish broke loose.

Back at the fire, he heaped on wood from a plentiful supply. A frenzy seized him. Food! Price's idol! All the bacon was fed to the flames, its fat sizzling and adding to the mounting conflagration. More wood, and the salt pork! Tins of butter were opened and given to the blaze.

Despite his sudden frenzy, Roger knew exactly what he was doing, that he was risking his own life against a chance for victory. He was staking his courage against that of Alec Price.

Swiftly he slashed the flour sacks and emptied them over the lake, where the wind carried the contents away in a white cloud. Bean and rice bags were dumped into deep water. The sourdough can was hurled far out. A pie and half a cake were tossed into the fire.

Roger emptied each pack. He heaped more wood on the roaring blaze. He did not overlook salt and pepper, coffee and tea. Five minutes later, a chipmunk would have starved on that island.

Black smoke rose in a great cloud. The odor of scorching coffee swept away on

the breeze. Flour whitened the lake down wind. Roger Carr, grimly exultant, returned to his windfall.

Alec Price came back, paddling swiftly.

"What's goin' on here?" he snarled as he rushed to the fire.

Big sheets of bacon rind shriveled and curled in the flames. He saw empty butter tins and food sacks lying flat. Yet he did not comprehend.

"Thought you'd signal somebody with that black smoke, eh?" he scoffed.

"No," Roger said quietly, "I never considered that."

"Then what—?"

"Here's what!" Roger broke in coldly. "We can make steel in seven days from here. We don't eat until we get there."

Price's thin lips curled savagely and he started toward Roger. But he whirled back to the fire, lifted one of the empty sacks and poked at the roaring blaze.

Roger remained on his windfall watching. Price ran into the tent and tossed out blankets. He even emptied his own turkey.

"You cached something!" he snarled as he started again toward Roger. "Where is it?"

"Nothing is cached," Roger answered. "Get it through your head that there's nothing to eat—nothing this side of steel."

Price halted and stared.

"You gone crazy?"

His voice cracked a bit. It was the signal for which Roger had been waiting. He walked up to Price, slowly but with assurance.

"What are you going to do about it?" he demanded.

Price's heavy shoulders sagged. Fear widened his pale blue eyes.

"You burned everything?"

"Every damned thing!"

"But we can't make it! Two hundred miles! Up-stream most o' the way! And no grub!"

"We can make it! Get that tent down. The sooner we start, the sooner we eat."

Price's growing terror flared in a mad rage of despair. He clenched his huge fists and started toward Roger.

"Come on!" Roger barked. "Lay me out! Then where'll you be? Two can paddle and portage a lot faster than one."

The rage wilted. The big fists became flabby hands. Roger packed his entire one hundred and fifty pounds behind a blow that started from the knee.

Price rocked on his heels. As his head came back from the snap, another fist caught his jaw. His knees sagged. He sat down.

"You big, gutless pup!" Roger sneered. "Get onto your feet so we can be going."

Even the blows had not penetrated the man's utter despair.

"It's no use!" he wailed. "We can't do it with nothing to eat!"

"You've eaten enough in the last four days to paddle a thousand miles on."

Price arose slowly. He hooked a shriveled bacon rind from the blaze but dropped it with an expression of disgust.

"Bring it along," Roger jeered. "It will taste good in a couple of days. And get that tent down!"

He started forward when Price only stared blankly, for Roger saw what he faced. A swift stroke of appalling consequence had utterly cowed his captor. It had permitted even physical dominance. That must be maintained. Always! Through the days of starvation and toil and despair that lay before them!

Roger unleashed everything he had, courage, bitter resentment, soaring confidence, relentless purpose, heedless daring, and these fused in a flaming message to every muscle in his body. He attacked Price with a fury that in itself terrified an already shattered spirit.

Head down, arms driving straight, Roger beat at a mid-section softened by four days of gluttony. When Price doubled up, the attack was switched to his

long, lean face. By sheer ferocity, Roger battered the big man to his knees, then contemptuously thrust him flat with a foot against his chest.

"Two hundred miles!" Price moaned as he lay there. "What you burn *all* the grub for? Why didn't you save just one side o' bacon?"

"I burned it to beat you," Roger retorted. "I told you at the start that you couldn't beat me. I didn't save a thing because I've got guts and I knew you didn't have. Look here!"

He ran to the canoe and took the trolling line, wound on a stick, from the stern. A moment later it was in the roaring blaze.

"That's the end!" he shouted. "No chance now to get anything to eat this side of steel. Let's start!"

They got away before mid-afternoon. They had a little more than eight days before the evening of July fifteenth. Two hundred miles lay between them and the railroad.

Mostly up-hill! Rapids! Falls! The river fought them viciously. Weakness came, a dead, intolerable weight that stretched the miles endlessly and made mountains of low portages.

Roger Carr often forgot why he wished to get to steel. He forgot Kabatogama and the wealth it meant for him. This new world had no place for such trivial things. It was filled with portages and paddles, with a hulk of flesh that must be spurred to action.

Roger forgot days. He forgot miles. He did not know how long he had been traveling or how long he must go. He was aware only that he was a stronger man than Alec Price, that he must drive Price to collapse. And then go on!

The morning of the seventh day, Alec Price would not rise. Tent and blankets had been thrown away long before. Only the canoe remained, and Price lay beside it.

Roger's fiercest kicks were soft. Price did not even wince. Laboriously, one at a time, Roger gathered dry twigs and a few shreds of birch bark. The bare thought of that extra effort brought agony. He built a pyre against Alec Price's back. A match, struck with monumental thought and care, set the flames to leaping.

Price got up, and fell into the canoe.

All that day, Roger paddled alone. Each stroke was like leaping a ten foot ditch. It required thought and preparation, and a tremendous gathering of energy.

But triumph spurred him. He had only to look at the inert figure in the bow, at the fat and muscle that were disintegrating for want of a vital spark.

"Price couldn't beat me! Price couldn't beat me!"

The phrase worked into the rhythm of his paddle strokes. The beat of it persisted long after the words had lost meaning.

Moments of lucidity were rare in that seventh day. During one, Roger believed he had ten strokes left, and no more. He counted them. At the end the paddle was still in his hands, and Price a blurred heap in the bow.

"I've got ten more," Roger muttered.

The canoe crawled around a bend into a straight reach. A train rolled across the far end. Its rumble filled the forest. But Roger was once more counting ten.

A provincial policeman stood on the bank beneath the bridge.

"My God!" he whispered. "Dead! And still going!"

Hours later, when oft repeated but small doses of hot soup had brought Roger new strength, he sat in a little hotel beside the twin lines of steel. Telegrams had been sent. The rich Kabatogama claims were his.

"Dave Connor asked me to happen along about now," the policeman said. "Anything you want me to do?"

Alec Price lay moaning on a bed.

"No," Roger said. "It's all been done."

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

J. D. NEWSOM, who returns to our Writer's Brigade with "All You Do Is Fight!," has long had an intense interest in the French Foreign Legion, arising from frequent observation of its work in Africa and from having fought beside it in the World War. Mr. Newsom is an Anglo-American, born in Shanghai of an American mother and an English father. He devoted years to the study of anthropology, lived in the South Seas and other out-of-the-way places observing primitive races. He was an artillery captain in the British army in the World War, was wounded once on land, and later was shot down in an observation balloon. He writes:

Because I find it very pleasant to be back with *Adventure* again, I append a few notes and comments on my story.

The French Foreign Legion is not as black as it has been painted. It's a tough outfit, its system of discipline is extremely rigorous, but the fact that it succeeds in making such splendid fighting men out of such unpromising material stands to the everlasting credit of its officers and n. c o's.

Of course, no system administered by human beings is fool proof. There are officers so lacking in tact and understanding that they can never win the confidence of their men; there are sergeants who are dismal, stupid brutes. And, inevitably, there are men in the ranks who never know when they are well off and who would kick over the traces no matter where they happened to be, in the Legion or out of it.

I think I know what I am talking about. I have been in close contact with the Legion in barracks, on the line of march and in action, from the plains of the Somme in far-away 1916 to Bou-Denib in the Tafilalet hills of South Morocco. I know it perhaps a little too well for the peace of mind of certain fussy propagandists who threatened at one time to have me silenced because I refused to write about the Legion as though it were a Heaven on earth and Legionnaires a flock of angels twanging lethal but melodious harps. I have not been silenced yet, and I propose to go on writing about human beings as I find them, neither very, very good, nor very, very bad, but a mixture of both which makes them ridiculous, cantankerous and extremely likable.

The best proof that my yarns must ring true is that, last June, a story of mine "A Bit of Red Ribbon," originally published in *Adventure*, was translated into French by a retired commandant of the Legion, and published in serial form in "Paris-Soir," which has the largest circulation of all the evening papers in Paris.

My one kick against the Legion, and I make no bones about it, is that it ought not to exist. If the French think so highly of their colonial empire it seems to me that they ought to be willing to fight and to die for it themselves instead of hiring dubious foreign mercenaries to do their dirty work. Apart from that it's one of the most splendid regiments on the face of the earth, chiefly because it ignores all sham and hypocrisy and goes about its business, which is rather gory, without mealy-mouthed apologies—a refreshing state of mind in this day and age.

IF YOU'VE already read "Pecos Bill" in this issue you won't be surprised to learn that Tex O'Reilly is pure Irish in blood and that he was born and reared in our own Southwest. It takes a combination like that to produce such a yarn.

To go a little more into detail, his grandparents were an O'Reilly, an O'Ryan, a Healy and a Murphy, and he himself first saw the light of day in 1880 in the town of Denison, Texas—the town being at that time scarcely any older than he was himself. He did a great deal of his growing up in covered wagons, for his father moved from place to place building court houses and jails, and he saw his share of gun fighting, for at that time they were starting to try to fence the open ranges and flying bullets just naturally followed the barbed wire. So he knows his West.

Flying bullets. Maybe those two words will remind you where you have heard of Tex O'Reilly before. He is the man whom Lowell Thomas called probably the most famous soldier of fortune alive. Ten wars under eight flags is his record so far. We hope he will tell

us something about them in Camp-Fire himself soon. In the meantime when you read "Pecos Bill" we think you will be glad that Tex O'Reilly has found time to lay down the sword—pistol, machine gun, grenade, and what have you—and pick up the pen.

There'll be more stories about "Pecos Bill." Tex O'Reilly dropped into the office this week. He didn't press the point he made but he did remark, with a damn-your-eyes expression, that the Chinese never built the Great Wall, they're only taking credit for a job that was done by "Pecos Bill."

LELAND JAMIESON, who wrote "Man to Man," is probably pushing a plane full of mail along over a Southern state as these lines are being written. We have in our Brigade several ex-flyers who write aviation stories for us, and who get aloft now and then to keep their hands in. Mr. Jamieson still flies as a regular job. He comes into New York occasionally when some illness or absence along the route calls for a change of schedules and gives him the Northern end of the route. He says of himself:

I was born in Oklahoma (Indian Territory) in 1904, and grew up in the small college town of Edmond, where my father was a professor by day and a dairy farmer mornings and evenings. Like most sons of real scholars, I was no scholar.

Since I was fifteen I have worked more or less seriously at being a rodman on a surveyor's gang, a mule skinner, an insurance salesman and a music store clerk; have frittered away a few years in college, managed (and mismanaged) a dance orchestra in which I played trumpet very badly, learned to fly at the Air Corps Schools in San Antonio (1925), and held a second lieutenancy in the Regular Army for three years.

In 1929 I resigned the commission to write fiction, but the itch to fly (a veritable disease) overcame me after a few months and I abandoned the full-time fiction job to manage a system of flying schools. After a time, during the bonanza days of aviation, I became operations manager of an air mail line. The bonanza, like all bubbles, burst at last, and I went on a night route, flying most of the time, and writing when I could. At present am flying day and night mail on various divisions of the Miami-New York route.

There was a time when I thought nothing could be more thrilling than to fly, whether in an airplane, airship or free balloon; and once in a great while now, when I get myself caught "blind" in the "soup" at night and the engine spits a few times and threatens to make me jump out (I never have had to—yet—although I've been caught, God knows, enough), I revert very suddenly to that opinion. But most of the time it is just ordinary, prosaic, hard work, leaden with monotony; the ear-racking drum of the engine, the cramped closeness of the cockpit, the headwinds and the repeated blink of each succeeding beacon, which never will be passed, it seems, but is.

Yet I like to fly, and expect to continue. Writing, however, is more interesting. The combination of the two suits me exactly. The two greatest satisfactions I get, in the ordinary run of day-to-day working, are (1) a well-written story that pleases some editor, and (2) a tail-wind such as I find occasionally, which hurtles me down from Richmond to Jacksonville at a hundred and sixty miles an hour in crisp, cold air, under a full moon.

WE HAD the interesting experience a few evenings ago of seeing an unusual honor accorded one of our Writers' Brigade—decoration by the French government with the Cross of the Legion of Honor. Universal movietone reproduced the ceremony, with Graham MacNamee's voice making the explanations; and probably many readers saw the news reel, which was given an international release, without knowing that Major General George Ared White and Ared White, long one of the Writers' Brigade, are reputedly one and the same person. General White received the French decoration "for distinguished services in strengthening the bonds of amity and further cementing the ties of a traditional friendship between the two great Republics." As MacNamee explained, that citation related to his work in France following the armistice. He was also decorated by France with the Cross of the Black Star for his services as an American officer during the war. The Cross of the Legion of Honor was presented to General White, now commander of a Division,

by the Consul General at San Francisco, M. Yves Meric de Bellefon, representing the French government.

RECENTLY in *Ask Adventure* appeared a discussion of Judge Roy Bean, the Law West of the Pecos. There was a suggestion that we trace a flowery death sentence he had once pronounced. A reader, M. S. Blair of Terre Haute, wrote that we might get it from C. P. Ryan, of Indianapolis, Indiana. Mr. Ryan didn't have that one, but he sent us another, which follows this note. H. F. Robinson of the *Ask Adventure* staff also sent in a quite similar death sentence (apparently the same case) and accredited it to Judge Kirby Benedict of New Mexico, appointed shortly after the Civil War.

The story arises from the migration of a Mexican into Texas to live. He lived in that commonwealth two years and during that time he became embroiled with a Texan, resulting in the fatal injury of the United States citizen. He was captured and put in jail. His trial for murder had been going on for approximately a week, at the conclusion of which the judge had instructed the jury, and the jury had gone to its room to deliberate and find a verdict.

The old judge quietly went into his chambers and sat down, placed his feet on a radiator and was watching the people go to and fro on the street below. He felt tired and depressed, and suddenly remembered that he had a bottle of good liquor hidden behind a law book in the library. He immediately secured this and after taking a man-sized drink from the bottle, sat down and again viewed the proceedings on the street. He felt much better, and continued to drink from the bottle until the liquor was exhausted.

Shortly after consuming the contents thereof to his utter amazement the bailiff rapped on the door and announced that the jury had found a verdict. However, he instructed the bailiff to bring the jury in, after which the judge in unsteady fashion meandered out behind the bench and sat down heavily. Casting his eyes in the direction of the jury box, he finally located the foreman and asked if the jury had found a verdict. On the announcement that they had, he directed that the verdict be passed to the clerk to be read. The verdict read as follows:

"We, the jury, find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree."

The judge in turn, and in unsteady fashion, sought out the defendant seated with his attorneys in front of the bench and said, "Don Juan Valjan Vigilanti Karranzazas (hic), stand up and listen to me. It is usually considered a (hic) privilege for a man to come from foreign shores, to be Americanized (hic) and live under the protection of our (hic) flag, and when he does so and commits a crime, he knows full well (hic) that he must pay the penalty.

"Don Juan Valjan Vigilanti Karranzazas, you took the life of a fellow (hic) man. You have had a fair and impartial trial by a jury of (hic) twelve men, tried and true, and they have found you guilty, and it now becomes my (hic) duty to sentence you.

"Soon the blasts of a cold and cruel winter (hic) will be but a memory. The warm spring sunshine will melt the snows (hic) on yonder mountain peak, and little silvery rivulets will trickle down the mountain (hic) side to this fertile valley below and will moisten the crust of mother (hic) earth. The little posies will poke their heads up (hic) through the ground and will bloom in all their springtime beauty and will discharge (hic) their fragrance throughout the land.

"The warm spring air will kiss the buds (hic) of the trees and shrubs, and their leaves will unfold and cast their shadows over the greensward below (hic). The gentle spring zephyrs will tickle the tassels of the tall grasses (hic), and they will wave to and fro in perfect rhythm with the pussy willows and the columbines.

"The little birds (hic) will return from their haven of refuge in the southland where they went to avoid the blizzardly blasts of a cold and cruel winter (hic). They will build their nests and rear their young, and their little voices (hic) will fill this fertile valley with their melodious melodies.

"All nature will be in tune in one grand and glorious symposium of springtime beauty and joy, and the world will be happy. But you, Don Juan Valjan Vigilanti Karranzazas, you scum of the earth, you won't be here to see it (hic) for two weeks from today, at high noon, within the confines of the four walls (hic) of the county jail, you are going to be hung by your neck until dead."

A. S. H. himself—Arthur Sullivant Hoffman—dropped in. He has come in several times. When he arrives, authors wait and telephones go unanswered. He sits here answering questions, making suggestions, speaking wise editorial words. Out of his own kindness he is reading the magazine again, cover to cover. We can look forward to a communication from him in Camp-Fire soon. —H. B.

ASK ADVENTURE

for information you can't get elsewhere

MR. JAMES B. LEFFINGWELL writes from that romantic sounding Isle of Pines, Cuba:—

The West Indies Department of Ask Adventure has received innumerable inquiries in regard to "Schooner Trading" in the Caribbean. Also the prospect of securing a small island and going native, setting up trading station, etc. To all these the answer is *no.*

The Western Tropics of today are as unromantic as Mobile, Alabama. There is absolutely no opportunity for the small investor. Americans are, for the most part, as unwelcome as illegitimate children at family reunions. The native has had the propaganda of "This land is only for the Native Son" pumped into him by the professional politician until foreign business both big and small is simply out of luck. The millions of good American dollars invested in the West Indies to develop the land may be placed in the red and forgotten.

Now, in regard to "Schooner Trading" it is simply impossible and the surest manner of securing free lodgings in some Spig Jail that I can imagine (You notice I said lodging, not board). Each island is a, so called republic, with customs regulations and tariff barriers that would make the project impossible. For instance, a trading vessel arriving in these waters with an un-consigned cargo would be in the toils of the law in twenty minutes and that would be just too bad, because getting tangled in Latin-American Laws means you lose—and how. This situation applies not only to Cuba, but to Haiti, Santo Domingo, the Dutch, French and British Islands as well. Now I think American ships carrying American cargoes *might* be permitted to trade in Porto Rico and the Virgins, provided there be no local laws to the contrary. However, this would certainly prove unprofitable as these parts are within the U. S. Tariff barriers and can sell as cheaply as you can.

In regard to the "Small Island" dream. It simply can't be did—any such place that is capable of sustaining life is already over populated, or belongs to the "State" and these countries will not dispose of Government lands to foreigners. However, should you be able to secure title or permission to reside on one of the "Small Islands" you would be tormented to death by mosquitoes and the devilish little "jejenes" or sandflys, against which screens are no protection (George Allan England calls 'em "Hayhennies," he knows 'em too well).

Then in regard to yachting in these waters. First write to the Department of State in Washington for regulations, and do not forget that the old Caribbean is no mill pond. To cruise these waters you must know your stuff and then have a fair-sized *seagoing* yacht.

TO the islands of turtles and peculiar plants in a 30 foot boat.

Request:—I have a 30 foot boat and I am planning to visit the Galapagos Islands. I have heard that these islands haven't any people living on them. Could you tell me whether that is true or not. I will appreciate all information you can give me concerning these islands.

—HARRY F. GRZESKI, Foresthill, Calif.

Reply by Lieut. Harry E. Rieseberg:—These islands are in the Pacific Ocean, on and near the equator, between long. 89° and 92° W., 730 miles west of the coast of Ecuador, South America, and consisting of 13 islands, the largest, Albemarle Island, being 60 miles in length. All are volcanic and abound in lavas. Most of the surface is arid, rising to 3,000-3,600 feet, but in the moist zones there is a fair and richly endemic flora.

The islands are frequented by turtles of enormous size, and the birds, animals, and plants are generally of very marked and peculiar species. Many of the plants introduced by the early colonists, such as cotton, fig, orange, and tobacco, have become widely distributed, and cattle, horses, dogs, pigs, and other domesticated animals run wild.

On Charles Island a small colony of Ecuadorians was started, forming a penal settlement; and this island contains most of the

population, which hardly exceeds 400 persons. The principal islands are Albemarle, Indefatigable, Chatham, James, Charles, Marborough, Hood, Barrington, Bindloes, and Abingdon. The group belong to Ecuador.

THEY'RE both diamonds if they scratch each other—and nothing else will mark them.

Request:—Will you be so kind as to send me information concerning the different tests by which genuine stones are recognized. What tests are used to see if the following stones are genuine?

1—Diamond. 2—Sapphire. 3—Turquoise. 4—Opal. 5—Topaz. 6—Onyx (sard and black).

—BENJ. O. CICHINSKI, Elizabeth, N. J.

Reply by Mr. F. J. Esterlin:—The identification of gem materials, is a matter of practice, attained through the constant handling of such materials. A simple rule for the materials mentioned is the hardness test (provided you are dealing with rough material).

Diamond is No. 10 in hardness and so can be scratched by nothing but a diamond. Sapphires (No. 9 in hardness) can be scratched by nothing but a diamond or another sapphire. Turquoise cannot be mistaken if you have seen turquoise as no imitation has been made with matrix in it.

Opal (fire opal) cannot be mistaken as no imitation has been made which would be confusing. Genuine topaz (No. 8 in hardness) requires more experience to detect in its various colors, and could not be explained in a letter.

The only imitation of onyx and sard is colored glass or enamel, which can be scratched with a file, while true onyx cannot. If you will look for good books you will find all that could be told you in writing. A recent book by Kraus and Holden is an admirable work.

DOUGHNUT-SHAPED stones—Are they Indian relics of unknown origin?

Request:—On a recent trip to Santa Rosa Island found several doughnut-shaped stones about three inches in diameter and one and one-half inches thick with about a three-quarter inch hole in center.

One of these specimens has the hole all the way through the center and two have been broken with the hole not completed.

Have had several explanations advanced. One that these stones were for mixing dried paints or dyes and another that the stones were rolled along the ground and the natives attempted to shoot arrows into the holes.

If you can offer me any authentic explanation, would be glad to have the matter cleared up.

—A. E. JUDSON, Welmar, Calif.

Reply by Mr. Arthur Woodward:—The doughnut-shaped stones found on Santa Rosa are also found on the islands of Santa Cruz, San Nicolas, San Miguel, Santa Catalina and possibly San Clemente. They are also found on mainland coastal sites.

Various uses have been ascribed to them. One persistent idea prevails that they were the weights on digging sticks. There may be some truth in this. On the other hand, four stones of this type were discovered hafted to sticks by means of asphaltum and the stone heads were painted in a regular pattern. These specimens were found by a lad in a cave in the San Martinez Chiquito Mountains in Los Angeles County in 1884. They were in a large basket of ceremonial material and were purchased from him by an advanced pot hunter of the day, a Dr. Bowers, who in turn sold the collection to Peabody Museum.

These hafted specimens give us a rather definite clue to at least one usage, and certainly judging by the instability of the method of hafting with asphaltum to the shaft they were not used actively—which means but one thing—they were used in some ceremony and there is a hint that they may have been used in a rain-making ritual.

If you wish to read further on these stones, obtain from the library Bulletin No. 2 Bureau of American Ethnology "Perforated Stones from California" by Henry W. Henshaw, Washington, D. C., 1887.

Small paint mortars are usually well made and generally (but not always) show traces of red or yellow pigment in them. I should judge that your broken partially perforated specimens were simply unfinished, broken in the course of manufacture.

A PEONY planted in Chile would bloom in winter.

Request:—Do peonies grow in Chile or other parts of South America?

If so what month of the year the flowers bloom? If you can not furnish us with this information, can you tell us where we can find out?

—FRANK E. RUTIG, Hope, N. J.

Reply by Mr. Edgar Young:—In South America the seasons are reversed. Their winter is our summer and vice versa. Chile is a long strip, the old Shoe String Republic, some 1,600 miles long and from one to two hundred miles wide. Down here in Virginia the peony is a late summer bloomer and if one of these plants were transferred to Southern Chile it would want to do its stuff in the winter time and would consequently have to be kept inside. If planted in their Spring the seed would germinate and the plant start

blooming the following year at the correct time, according to their reckoning. If this plant were shipped up here it would have the opposite habits of plants acclimated to our seasons. I imagine one could do the same thing here by planting and evolving plants with opposite habits of blooming. The Christmas and Easter cacti, so-called, are from South America or Australia where they are timed to bloom in South Hemisphere summer but when brought up here bloom midwinter. These, as a rule, are produced from cuttings. I have never tried planting seed of these cacti to see if they could be made to bloom in our summer. Possibly not. Also the peony experiment might be a failure.

To be entirely truthful, I have a place in Florida where I do quite a bit of pottering with flowers and shrubs. Here in Virginia I do a lot of work with them as a hobby. South America is a bit different. In Brazil and Argentine I visited some great botanical gardens but in Chile I did not see any such place. What flowers and plants I saw were the individual property of English and American residents of Valparaiso and Santiago, and not very many plants at that. The whole of Northern Chile is desert where rain seldom if ever falls and where whatever is raised is raised under irrigation or in the house. Water is very precious in some places.

About the surest way would be to write Pan American Union, Washington, D. C. and ask them to put you in touch with some one in Iquique, Valparaiso, Santiago and Punta Arenas, to whom you can write direct. Wessel Duval and Co., Calle Cochrane, Valparaiso, Chile, would possibly answer your letter also. They have several branches where they can get the information. Duncan Fox and Co., of the same city, also have a number of branches in various parts of the country. It will take over a month to hear so it would be a good plan to write several letters to be sure of getting a reply among them that would be definite. While at it write the American Consul at each place.

THE family history of the coral snake seems to depend on spots and rings.

Request:—I am unable to find in any publications or manuals available in this section a structural comparison of the two species of coral snake (Micrurus) found in this country. The species, M. euryxanthus, supposedly limited to Mexico and the region of the Rio Grande, is found here as well as the more common fulvius.

There are many specimens, the majority in fact, that are easily differentiated by coloration alone but occasional specimens have color characteristics of both species. I would like to obtain the most complete systematic data concerning structure and scalation, and I know of no other place more likely to be able to furnish said information than your museum. If possible, list any other sources of possible data concerning these two species.

There seems to be a tendency of M. fulvius that causes it to resemble more and more the Mexican species as we go further south. In Louisiana, the red and black rings are of equal width, but throughout East Texas the red rings are much wider, and as we proceed further south the yellow rings also grow wider until I am unable to differentiate. I am beginning to be of the opinion that either there is cross-breeding or that the two are but varieties of the same species. For this reason, I am requesting key or information as above.

—WILL L. SMITH, Beaumont, Texas.

Reply by Mr. Karl P. Schmidt:—I am very much interested in your coral snake questions. I have been working on this group, off and on, for the past ten years, but have not had enough specimens from Louisiana and eastern Texas to get anywhere. The dope is that there are three very closely related forms of the common species, Micrurus fulvius. These are *Micrurus fulvius fulvius*, North Carolina to Central Florida and west to Mississippi; *M. f. barbouri*, in southern Florida only, and *M. f. tenere*, Louisiana to Tamaulipas. The only difference I have found between the Texas specimens and the typical Florida form is in the amount and arrangement of the black spots in the red rings.

I would very much like to see coral snakes from your locality, both alive and preserved. If the Museum were not broke, I could offer to pay for them. As it is, I can only offer to look them over and give you my opinion as to their relations. There is no record of the Arizona coral snake, *Micruruides euryxanthus* as far east as El Paso, and it is unknown from Central or Eastern Texas. Perhaps you have something else. Glad to identify snakes at any time if you send specimens; can't do it from descriptions.

A POT of gold and a lost Dutchman, just outside of Phoenix.

Request:—I am very interested in getting some information concerning the Superstition Mountains of your state. I have read and heard so many strange facts about these mountains that I would like to try and take a trip to these mountains. What's the story?

CARL G. PYDOCK, Louisville, Colo.

Reply by Mr. Gordon Gordon:—Because a world of glamorous tales have been spun about the Superstition mountains in Arizona and the fabulous fortunes that are to be found within their tortuous canyons, they have become about as famous as the Grand Canyon and the Hopi Snake dances.

The Superstitions are near Phoenix, Arizona, and adventurers planning to penetrate into their fastnesses usually outfit there. Unless you are accustomed to the tricks of

the deserts and mountains, it's best to have a guide. Otherwise, you'll find yourself lost on the maze of trails and far from any water supply. That is the reason why the Superstitions have taken so many lives. It's dangerous country.

I assume that you're interested in the "pot of gold" that is supposed to be buried somewhere in the Superstitions, near a mine which is reputed to be a cornucopia of wealth. Many men have tried to find the mine. The Apaches say that death itself guards the secret. Perhaps so. Anyway, ten men have died within modern times while searching for wealth, perishing either in the terrible agony of thirst or shot down like prowling coyotes.

Ever since 1891, when Jacob Walz died in Phoenix, buckaroos and soldiers-of-fortune, sitting about the firelight at nights, have spat many a quid in recounting the mystery of the Lost Dutchman mine.

Walz and another Dutchman, Jacob Wiser, first appeared in Florence, Arizona, about eighty years ago. They went into the jagged Superstitions together, just another gold-crazed pair of prospectors dreaming of the fortune at the foot of the rainbow. Their fantasies came true. They returned, carrying bags of high-grade ore which they sold in Phoenix and Florence. More trips into the hills, always alone, and more saddle pokes of the yellow metal. Wealth was theirs.

And then Death played its first hand. Returning one day, so the legend runs, they found a swarthy Mexican at the tunnel. They shot him.

Wiser died shortly afterwards. That left only Walz. He had grown old, however, and didn't make as many trips as he once had. He settled on a farm near Phoenix to spend his last days. First, though, he covered up the tunnel entrance with earth and rocks, planting mesquite in order to make the camouflage more real.

Walz died some forty-three years ago. Breathing his last, he gave the directions to a friend who forgot most of them.

Such is the yarn that has been woven by cowboy troubadors for four decades. Until three years ago, it was only another of those gay fables that enrich western lore.

Then Adolf Ruth, a government employe of Washington, D. C., took the story to heart. You probably recall the news articles about him. He obtained an old map, a supposedly authentic one. Anyway, he considered it so reliable that he gambled his life's savings. He went into the Superstitions alone. Time passed. The mountains had swallowed him. A year later, in 1932, an archaeological party found his buzzard-ravaged body. He had lost his way, the water holes had vanished, and Death had played another ace.

That spurred interest in the Lost Dutchman mine. A trek began that has swelled in numbers each year. More than two hundred went into the mountains last summer.

Such is the story. If you're planning to go into the Superstitions, I envy you the glorious fun that you'll probably have. But don't forget to sign some prospector up for a dollar or two a day, just in case the way out is rather hazy—that is, unless you are yourself a "desert road runner."

When you arrive in Phoenix, the chamber of commerce can give you explicit instructions about how to get into the Superstitions.

And may you have a good trip!

RECENTLY inquiries have poured in about State Police and Federal Secret Service. Here are the general requirements. Each state has special variations. Mr. Francis H. Bent writes:

Nearly all states require that applicants be residents of the State. Age 21-40, height 5 feet 6 inches minimum, weight 140, High School education. Pay of State Police $100 a month, with State furnishing uniforms, arms, equipment, board and lodging. Pay of Highway Patrols, about $150 a month, and patrolman lives at home and furnishes uniforms and arms.

Applicant for Secret Service must be between 21 and 40; full common school education; at least one year experience in responsible investigational work; well proportioned as to height and weight; no conspicuous physical oddities; no physical defects; sight at least 20/30 combined with 20/40 in weaker eye, without glasses; hearing at least 15 feet each ear ordinary conversation.

Experience with police departments or simple routine investigating is not considered qualifying. Experience must be obtained in some position similar to investigator in important criminal cases for reputable practicing lawyers.

Pay runs about $2,300 a year. Position is filled by examination held under the U. S. Civil Service Commission, Washington, D. C.

I give you merely the average, or the minimum. Some of the states vary. The matter of residence is one point they all agree on.

WANTED:—Authentic and artistic pictures of ships.

Request:—Will you please give me the name and address of a dealer in old sailing ship pictures, such as *The Torrens* or the *Suffolk?*

—DR. E. PARSHALL, Falfurrias, Texas.

Reply by Mr. Charles H. Hall:—The Spurling prints, more commonly known as the "Blue Peter" prints, may be purchased from Kelvin & Wilfrid O. White, 38 Water Street, the American agents for this series. They are well done and technically correct.

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Adventure

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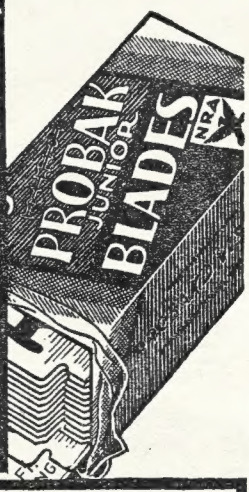

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Sell FAMILY PROTECTION AT COST

PAYS UP TO $1000 Cash *in time of need*

Costs only few cents a week

$5 PROFIT EVERY $6 Sale

Millions need and want protection that pays up to $1,000 cash in case of Accident or Death. No medical examination. Men, women, children aged 1 to 80 accepted. Membership costs only few cents a week.

FULL OR SPARE TIME WORK

Merely tell friends, neighbors about this new plan. They enroll eagerly. $5 cash for you for every member secured. No experience or investment needed. Complete selling outfit sent at once. Write today.

NATIONAL AID SOCIETY, Dept. R-1, Springfield, Ill.

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Executive Accountants and C. P. A.'s earn $3,000 to $15,000 a year. Thousands more are needed. We train you thoroughly at home in spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous bookkeeping knowledge or experience unnecessary. Training given by C. P. A.'s. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays," and learn about opportunities in this growing, profitable field.

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Diesel Engineering

The Diesel Engine is fast replacing old-type engines in locomotives—ships—airplanes—motor car—tractors—industrial and commercial power plants.

This field is opening so rapidly on land, water, and in the air that trained men are already scarce. We train you thoroughly through home study in 1 year. Send for Free Bulletin TODAY. No obligation.
American School, Dept. D-11 Drexel at 58th, Chicago

CONSTIPATED?

you must read this

IF you're constipated, what are you doing about it?

Are you taking a purgative that goes through you like dynamite? Does your laxative upset you? Does it give you actual pain—upsetting your digestion—leaving you weak after you take it?

If you are taking rough measures, *you may be sorry.*

DON'T PUNISH YOURSELF WITH NASTY, VIOLENT PURGATIVES! YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

You can get real relief without pain—without stomach disturbance.

And the way to do it is to take gentle, effective Ex-Lax, the laxative that tastes just like delicious chocolate.

Ex-Lax does its work gently but surely—without pain, without upsetting you, without leaving you weak. Ex-Lax will not form a habit. And you don't have to keep on increasing the dose to get results.

Don't fool around with the wrong laxative any more. *Ex-Lax is the right relief for constipation.*

At any drug store—in 10c and 25c boxes.

Look for the exact spelling—E-X-L-A-X. Don't experiment with substitutes!

When Nature forgets—remember

EX-LAX

THE CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

TIRED OUT?

ACROSS HIS DESK flows the news of the world: Ray Baker of International News Service. 70,000 miles of telegraph wires and direct cable loops with foreign countries flash 100,000 words a day to Baker ... to be quickly judged and edited.

GET A LIFT WITH A CAMEL

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PERSONAL EXPERIENCES THAT POINT THE WAY TO INCREASED ENERGY!

"The man on the INS news desk has a high-pressure job," says Ray Baker. "A big story breaks and I am on the desk for ten hours... twelve hours...working at top speed! The most enjoyable way of easing the strain that I know is smoking Camels. Whenever I feel 'all in' Camels bring back my pep, and I can tackle the next big story with renewed energy! For over ten years I've preferred Camels. They have a distinctive flavor that just suits me. And I can smoke Camels continually without jangled nerves."

Science confirms the experience of smokers regarding Camel's "energizing effect." You can smoke them freely. Camel's matchless blend of costlier tobaccos never upsets the nerves!

LEAF-TOBACCO EXPERTS AGREE:

"Camels are made from finer, More Expensive Tobaccos — Turkish and Domestic — than any other popular brand."

HOCKEY STAR. "Bill" Cook, Captain of the famous N. Y. Rangers, says: "I guard my nerves and yet smoke all I want because I smoke only Camels. Their taste sure hits the spot!"

BUSINESS GIRL. Eve L. Miller says: "I started to smoke Camels because I appreciate mildness and delicacy of flavor. And I found that Camels give me a 'lift' when my energy is low."

Camel's costlier Tobaccos never get on your Nerves!